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cleaning and washing. The place concerned, the rocks and the falls are where such shells can be found. These may have given them the names, or some other derivations have to be looked for. We then come to two other names of villages near Kandy, Uḍu-rāvana and Yaṭi-rāvana. Notwithstanding the fact that Rāvaṇa was not associated with Kandy, and Kandy is not taken to be an ancient royal seat, yet the recent popular etymology is that they are parks of Rāvaṇa, where another component *vana* has to be supplied to make it Rāvaṇa-vana. One may reasonably think that, considering how syllables waste away and syncope takes place with place-names, Uḍurāvana and Yaṭi-ravana, are the upper and lower royal forests or parks (*rāja-vana*). The cerebral *ṇ* in the modern spelling is the result of the false etymology.

There are place-names, now pronounced and also written with the first member of the compound Sītā, such as Sītā-vaka, a royal seat in the later fifteenth and the early sixteenth century, near the modern town of Avissawella. The late traditions are that Sītā in her exile bathed at the bend of the river (*vaka*) which is a tributary of the Kelaniganga. There is also Sītā-eliya near the hill health-resort of Nuvara-eliya. Also in the hill country are Sītā-gaṅgula and Sītā-alla. Sītā-gaṅgula is a broad pond-like spot in a stream, and Sītā-alla is a fall in a stream both near Nuvara-eliya. These are also said to be bathing spots of Sītā. Sītā-eliya is an open space, a *patana* land near Nuvara-eliya, and here the ground being black due to strata of patana grass rotting yearly, is pointed out as the result of the burning by Hanumant. It is clear that in these cases the first member of the compound was *sīta*, meaning cool or cold, as was later associated with Sītā. Except the name Sītā-vaka, the rest are of modern modification, and the result can also be due to English spelling where the length of vowels are not marked. Early English writers in Ceylon were much enamoured with the idea that Ceylon was the home of Rāvaṇa.

It must also be pointed out here that there is no place-name with Rāma used as the member of a compound. One may explain that it was due to his not being long in Laṅkā. But what of Vibhīṣaṇa? The association of places with Rāvaṇa and Sītā,

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are very late, and this is after the Sinhalese accepted Rāvaṇa as an ancient giant king of their island.

Art

So much for literature and folk-lore. There is no evidence even in art to show that either the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic was popular in Śrī Laṅkā in ancient time or there was any worship of Rāma in his own right separately or as Viṣṇu who had appeared on earth as Rāma. True that some Lakṣmī plaques have been found. These could have been brought in by merchants, both foreign and Sinhalese. They could also have been minted in imitation of such plaques as were accepted by dealers in goods, just as Roman coins were minted locally. So far as we know, the earliest Gaja-Lakṣmī figure found in Śrī Laṅkā is on a side of the Galpota-inscription of Niśśaṅkamalla (A.D. 1187-1196), a king who had foreign associations, with the Kāliṅgas of South-East Asia. There is also a Gaja-Lakṣmī sculpture at Yāpahu which was the capital in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. These sculptures are after the Cholian occupation of the northern portion of Śrī Laṅkā, including Polonnaruwa.

Classical Indian Writers

Indian writers, at least those between the eighth and the twelfth centuries, have distinguished between Laṅkā and Siṁhala. Two authors of two dramas on the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme are very clear and definite in showing this distinction. In his account of the homeward journey of Rāma and his party from Laṅkā to Ayodhyā, Murāri in his *Anargharāghava* (ninth century A.D.) brings them over the Siṁhala-dvīpa only some time after they had left Laṅkā. Murāri has also that the Rohaṇa mountains are in the Siṁhala-dvīpa, and this is correct. More precise are the accounts of Rājaśekhara in two of his works (9th-10th centuries). In his drama, the *Bālarāmāyaṇa*, Rājaśekhara makes Rāvaṇa describe the location of Laṅkā to be to the south of Siṁhala. The lords of Laṅkā and Siṁhala are separately mentioned. Not only the Rohaṇa mountains, but the city of Anurādhāpura also is in the Siṁhala country. Further, at the contest of the bending of God Śiva's bow, Rāvaṇa speaks of the Siṁhala King as a person other than himself. During the

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journey by air, when the party goes back to Ayodhyā, Rāma looks back and points towards Laṅkā as being the capital of the new King Vibhīṣaṇa. It is only after the *vimāna* had ascended to the sky and come down that Vibhīṣaṇa points out Siṁhala-maṇḍala to Sītā. In his chapter on geography (Deśavibhāga) of the *Kāvyamīmāṁsā* also, Rājaśekhara is very definite in distinguishing Laṅkā from Siṁhala. The former is a *rājadhāni*, a capital; the latter is a *janapada*, a settlement (of Aryan speaking people, or a district).

To Indian writers in mediaeval times Siṁhala was not the home of Rākṣasas. The heroine of Śrī Harṣadeva's drama, the *Ratnāvalī*, is the daughter of King Vikramabāhu, the lord of Siṁhala. In the *Kathāsaritsāgara* of Somadeva we read of a king by the name of Vikramāditya marrying the daughter of the king of Siṁhala. A king of Siṁhaladvīpa by the name of Sirimehe (Sanskrit : Śrīmegha) is eulogized in the Mahārāṣṭri poem *Līlāvai* (*Līlāvatī*) of Kouhala (before 12th century). Śrīmegha was the alternative throne name of Sinhalese kings from about the eighth century to the twelfth century A.D., the other being Sirisangha-bodhi. Malik Muhammad, in his Avadhi poem *Padumāvatī* also speaks of the Siṁhala-dvīpa as the birth-place of charming women. The *Bṛhatsaṁhitā* of Varāhamihira (section on geography) and the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* also mention Siṁhala.

All these statements go to show that in the Aryanized countries in the North of India the country of the Siṁhalas was not considered to be a place inhabited by Rākṣasas or uncivilized people.

Spread of the Rāmāyaṇa

[1]Prof. H. D. Sankalia has brought out evidence to show that the *Rāmāyaṇa* had not spread in South India until the tenth century (*op. cit.*, pp. 54-55, etc.) Paramasiva Iyer, after recounting the conquests of the Sinhalese by the Pandya and Chola kings, up to the temporary restoration of Sinhalese independence by Parākramabāhu I continues, "The Cholas claimed Solar descent, and it is likely that it was during the two

[1] But see above 'The Rāmāyaṇa in Tamilnādu', Dr. R. Nagaswamy. The early Tamil Sangam classics know the Rāmāyaṇa well.—Ed.

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centuries of Chola dominance in Ceylon the Siṁhala King and his army were made out to be Rāvaṇa and his Rākṣasas hosts. It would seem that in the Tamil inscriptions of Rājarāja and Rājendra, Ceylon is called 'Īḷa'... If 'Īḷa' is short for Ilangai and Laṅkā, that would suggest that verses 17-25 of Sarga 41 of Kiṣkindhā were interpolated during the sway of Rājarāja of Imperial Rājendra whose dominions extends to Malaya beyond the sea. The great Tamil poet Kambar flourished in the second half of the 12th century..." (*op. cit.,* Introduction and particularly pp. xiv ff.).

The findings set out above agree with what emerges when the literary evidence of every kind is subjected to a critical examination in respect of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story or any Rāma cult. It is true that still during the earlier centuries a poet of the Sinhalese royal family wrote the excellent Mahākāvya, the *Jānakīharaṇa.* Many Sanskrit books had been known in Ceylon and good original works were produced in the island; but this knowledge was limited to a few, the court circles or the higher ranks of city-dwelling Buddhist monks. The stories or ideas from Sanskrit Literature had not reached the masses, nor had they begun to borrow extensively the worship of South Indian Gods. Some of the common folk were completely ignorant of them. Their interest was in Buddhist stories and Buddhist practices. When after Polonnaruwa king of Śrī Laṅkā beginning from Parākramabāhu II of Dambadeniya made allies of South Indian kingdoms, accepted their culture along with Buddhism, brought priests and books from foreign lands, the rustics following their rulers began to be interested in those cultures and their traditions. It was not only South India that gave the Sinhalese new ideas, beliefs and practices. Other countries of Asia sush as Siam, Malaysia and Burma contributed at least in some measure. It is not impossible that the *Rāmāyaṇa* stories and cults connected with it, could have reached South-East Asian countries before they reached the extreme south of the Peninsula and Śrī Laṅkā, and they came to Śrī Laṅkā from the direction. We have no knowledge as to whether the *Kambarāmāyaṇam* was known in Śrī Laṅkā soon after its composition. An abridged version of this was translated to Sinhalese only in 1840. Under these circumstances we are safe in dating the acceptance of the story of Rāma, Sītā and Rāvaṇa, as taking place in the Siṁhala country was in about the

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thirteenth century. Thereafter we find some notice of characters from the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the literature, and the gap between the learned writings and the popular ones begin to be narrower, to judge from what is existing. There is, however, hardly any representation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* themes in art, classical or popular.

In Kumāradāsa's *Jnk.*, we see the poet following the *Rāmāyaṇa* except for the change of a few incidents in the order of their occurrence. These may have been to work the events of the Mahākāvya in a smooth sequence. It is also possible that some other recension of the Epic which is not available to us was followed by the poet. The account of the return journey from the Rākṣasa City to Ayodhyā gives a good deal of material for thoughtful study. It appears that Kumāradāsa, as other classical Indian writers have done, takes his Laṅkā to be somewhere other than in the island of Śrī Laṅkā. In studying the geography of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as other scholars have already pointed out, not only the position of Laṅkā has been confused, but also that of a river Godā or Godāvarī. Kumāradāsa gets Rāma to point out to Sītā, the river Godā by which the two of them had spent happy moonlit nights (*Jnk.*, xx, 32). This Godā started from the Vindhya Hills according to the next verse. The river had vanished in the sands, and the copyist of a manuscript has altered *anu-Godaṃ* to *anu geham*. It is retained by the poetaster who altered Kumāradāsa's poem and made many interpolations, but he has confused the river with the Godāvarī in South India which starts near Aurangabad in Mahārāṣṭra. The poetaster takes in a number of rivers and mountains that are not in the original poem, including the rivers Tāmraparṇī, Kāverī and Narmadā (Revā), showing that he took Laṅkā to be to the South of the Peninsula. It is not possible in this paper to go into full details of the journey in the two versions of the poem, but one can easily conclude that the additions and alterations were done after the thirteenth century. This was the time when Śrī Laṅkā had been taken as the kingdom of Rāvaṇa and his Rākṣasa hosts by their neighbours in South India. The position was accepted by the Sinhalese, and as if it were to compensate, they made a hero of Rāvaṇa, declaring him to be a great physician versed in medical lore. Several treatises on medicine, such as a text called the *Kumāra-tantra*, "a treatise on the treatment of children" are attributed to Rāvaṇa.

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The Buddhist Version

Finally it is desirable that we examine the Buddhist version of the Rāma-Sītā story as we find it in the *Daśaratha-Jātaka* (D) comparing it with the *Rāmāyaṇa* (R). This is also appropriate as the Jātaka tales, even though brought to Śrī Laṅkā by Buddhist teachers from India, they grew in the island, were first written in Sinhalese, and finally translated into Pali in Śrī Laṅkā. Thus there should be plenty of Sinhalese influence in them. The geography of the stories is different. With regard to details about characters some agree and others do not.

(i) *Geography*

Capital City : D.—Benares, R.—Ayodhyā.

Place of Banishment : D.—Himālaya, R.—Daṇḍakāraṇya.

However the translation from Sinhalese also could be the cause of this difference, as in Sinhalese "Himaya" means any thick forest.

(ii) *Characters*

Daśaratha is the old king in both D and R, but in D, the chief queen, the mother of Rāma and Lakkhana (Lakṣmaṇa in R) had died, and the king had promoted a young queen to the position of the Chief Queen, and she becomes mother of Bharata. (The Sinhalese version has once the Sanskrit form Lakṣmaṇa in place of Laksana, the equivalent of Lakkhana. This may be due to the influence of the name of the character in the *Rāmāyaṇa* story on a copyist. We may summarise this in tabular form as follows :

R.—The mother queens are all alive.

D.—Sītā was a sister of Rāma and Lakkhaṇa, only at the coronation she became the Chief Queen of both the brothers who were consecrated simultaneously. (This may be compared with other instances of sister marriages in ancient India, particularly by members of the royal families.)

D.—King Daśaratha sets a limit of twelve years and sends the two elder sons to the forest, and dies after nine years.

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R.—He orders a period of fourteen years for the exile, and dies immediately after the departure of the two sons.

D.—Bharata does not follow the brothers at this stage.

R.—Bharata follows as soon as Daśaratha died.

D.—Bharata goes to the forest after the death of the father and invites Rāma, but Rāma does not come, and gives his sandals in his place.

R.—Incidents are same, but for the time factor.

D.—Sītā lived happily in the forest.

R.—Rāvaṇa's interference.

D.—Rāma and Lakkhaṇa return to Benares after the full twelve years are over and are both consecrated kings, with Sītā as the Chief Queen.

R.—Rāma and Sītā return to Ayodhyā and the rejection of Sītā.

Could both stories have had the same original kernel?

Añjana and Hanumant

Finally I should also refer to a magical practice to which Sinhalese people resort when they lose something valuable, or when they wish to avert an evil threatening them. On such occasions they seek the aid of Hanumant, through his mother Añjanādevī, but using *añjana* literally, making a collyrium paste with certain rare herbs, which they apply on a glass, a saucer or tumbler for gazing through. It is claimed that Hanumant appears and shows the thief or where the stolen goods are or show some sign in other matters like the healing of a gravely ill patient. Very few people know anything about the connection with the mother of Hanumant; they simply call the practice "Añjanam balanavā" understanding it to mean "looking through the collyrium paste." It appears that some actually say, "O! Añjanā-devī, mother of Hanumān, do show us the truth." I do not know whether this is a learned addition of modern times or whether it was known earlier. This magic cult must be separately studied as to its origin and age.

Note : The modern *Rāmāyaṇa* plays, such as the *Rāmāyaṇanāṭaka* of John da Silva (1886) have not been dealt with in this paper (Printed edition 1935).

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TULASĪDĀSA'S RĀMACARITAMĀNASA IN HINDI and Its Relationship to the Sanskrit Version of Vālmīki, the Tamil Version of Kamban, and the Thai Version of King Rāma I

By S. SINGARAVELU

The *Rāmacaritamānasa* ("Holy Lake of Rāma's Deeds"),[1] commonly known as *Tulasīkṛta-Rāmāyaṇa* ("Tulasi's *Rāmāyaṇa*"), is a poem composed in the *Avadhi* dialect of Hindi, and it is adknowledged to be the greatest achievement of Tulasīdāsa, a supreme poet and a great religious thinker and reformer, who lived in the second half of the 16th and in the first quarter of the 17th centuries A.D.[2] The subject of the

1 Tulasīdāsa, *Rāmacaritamānasa*, edited with commentary by Chimanlal Gosvami and Nanddularey Vajpeyi (Gorakhpur : Gita Press, 1938). See also *The Rāmāyaṇa of Tulasīdāsa*, translated from the original Hindi by F.S. Growse (Allahabad, 1877-1881; 8th edition, Allahabad : Ram Narain Lal Beni Prasad, 1966; (*The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rāma*, an English translation of Tulasīdāsa's *Rāmacaritamānasa* by W. Douglas P. Hill (Calcutta : Oxford University Press, 1952), hereinafter cited as *RCM(H)*.

2 According to common tradition, Tulasīdāsa was born at Rājāpur in the Banda district or, according to another view, at Sūkharaket or Ayodhyā in the Faizabad district, of the modern Uttar Pradesh state in northern India, in the Samvat year 1589 corresponding to 1532 A.D., or, according to another interpretation in the Samvat year 1600, that is 1543 A.D. On the evidence concerning the date of Tulasīdāsa's birth, see Mātāprasād Gupta, *Gosvāmī Tulasīdāsa* (Prayag : Indian Press, 1946), pp. 108-111 (in Hindi). Tulasīdāsa went on a pilgrimage to many sacred places including those in South India and returned to Ayodhyā, the birth place of Rāma, where he began to compose his great poem entitled *Rāmacaritamānasa* in the Samvat year 1631 corresponding to 1574 A.D. It would seem probable that he completed the composition of this work in Banaras where he had gone to live until his death in 1623 A.D. Apart from the *Rāmacaritamānasa*, several other poems on the Rāma-legend are attributed to Tulasīdāsa, and they include the *Gītāvalī*, *Kavitāvalī* and *Vinaya-patrikā*, which are considered to be among the poet's later works. See G.A. Grierson. "Notes on Tulasīdāsa", *IAy*, Vol. XXII (1893), pp. 264-274; "Tulasīdāsa, poet and religous reformer," *JRAS* (1903), pp. 446-447; "Tulasīdāsa", *ERE*, Vol. XII (Edinburgh, 1921), p. 471; *RCM(H)*, pp. ix-xvi; Tulasīdāsa, *Kavitāvalī*, translated and with a Critical Introduction by F.R. Allchin (London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1964), pp. 32-45; Tulasīdāsa, *The Petition to Rāma, Hindi Devotional Hymns of the Seventeenth century*, a translation of *Vinaya-patrikā* with Introduction, Notes and Glossary by F.R. Allchin (London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1966), pp. 17 and 31-36.

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Tulasikṛta-Rāmāyaṇa is no doubt the same as that of *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa;* generally speaking, it follows the course of Vālmīki's story, and like the *Ādi-kāvya* it is arranged into seven kāṇḍas ("Books") bearing the names that Vālmīki had given to the major sectios of his poem. But the *Rāmacaritamānasa* is in no way a Hindi translation of Vālmīki's epic[3], nor, indeed, of any other poem in Sanskrit.[4] Indeed, on the contrary, *Tulasikṛtra-Rāmāyaṇa* differs from Vālmīki's Sanskrit epic in regard to the whole spirit and orientation of its central theme. The story of Rāma narrated by Vālmīki in the original part of his epic is that of a royal hero who belonged to the Ikṣvāku dynasty. In Tulasīdāsa's poem, on the other hand, Rāma is one with the Supreme Being Viṣṇu and therefore with Brahman the Absolute.[5] He is the impersonal Absolute who has assumed a personal form for the benefit of the faithful; at the same time Tulasīdāsa is anxious to explain that Rāma's humanity is not real but merely a manifestation of divine *līlā* or play. As a child, Rāma finds amusement in revealing himself to his mother as the Universal Form.[6] His love for Sītā is but a renewal of the love

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3 G.A. Grierson, "Tulasīdāsa," *ERE,* Vol. XII (Edinburgh, 1921), pp. 471-472; *RCM(H)*, p. xvii.

4 When an attempt was made to claim that Tulasīdāsa's *Rāmacaritamānasa* was a Hindi translation of a Sanskrit poem entitled *Śambhu-Rāmāyaṇa.* Sir George A. Grierson rejected the notion and sugested with good reason that the *Śambhu-Rāmāyaṇa* appeared to be a Sanskrit translation of Tulasīdāsa's original Hindi poem. See G.A. Grierson, "Is the Rāmāyaṇa of Tulasīdāsa a translation?" *JRAS* (1913), pp. 133-141.

5 *RCM(H)*, Book 1, *Dohā* 108, *Caupāī* 110 and 116, pp. 55 and 57-58.

6 *Ibid.*, Book 1, *Dohā* 200-202, *Caupāī* 199-200, pp. 92-93: "One day his mother (Kausalyā) bathed and dressed him and put him to sleep in his cradle. Then she too bathed, preparing to worship the Blessed Lord, the patron deity of her house. When she had worshipped and offered her oblation, she went to the place where she had prepared the sacrificial meal, and when she returned to the place of worship, she saw her son eating the oblation. She ran off alarmed at her baby and saw him sleeping there as before. She came back and saw her son again. Her heart beat fast and she was all unstrung. She saw two boys, one here, one there! She thought, "Is my mind all astray or is there some explanation?'

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that Viṣṇu bears Lakṣmī.[7] When in the battle of Laṅkā he allows himself to be entangled in the coils of the serpentine missiles shot at him by Rāvaṇa's son Indrajit, he is said to be merely practising illusions.[8]

Rāma is also compared to an actor who plays on the stage in various disguises but himself remains what he really is all the time.[9]

The poems of Tulasīdāsa and Vālmīki are also dissimilar in regard to the sequence as well as the treatment of the various episodes and events in the story. Vālmīki's epic begins with a short introduction, which is followed by the description of Ayodhyā, King Daśaratha, his ministers, and of the king's desire for a son.[10] Tulasīdāsa, on the other hand, begins his poem with

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When Rāma saw his mother so perplexed, he smiled sweetly and laughed. He displayed to his mother his own wondrous form, indivisible. A myriad universes she beheld set on every hair; numberless suns and moons, Śivas and Brahmās, manyu a mountain and river, sea, land and wood; time, destiny, the three constituents, knowledge and nature—all that she had ever heard of! When she beheld the mystic vision, she stood in dire alarm with folded hands. She saw the soul that illusion makes to dance; she saw the faith that sets it free. She felt a thrill of awe; no words came from her lips. She closed her eyes and bowed her head before his feet. Seeing his mother lost in amazement, Kharāri ("Foe of Khara", that is, Viṣṇu=Rāma) once again became a child; but she could not sing his praises for very fear. She thought, "I held the Father of the world to be my own son!" Earnestly Hari (Viṣṇu-Rāma) warned his mother, 'Hear me, mother! Nowhere repeat what you have seen!" Again and again Kausalyā humbly besought him with folded hands, "Never again, O Lord, may thy magic power affect me with its influence!"

7 *Ibid.*, Book 2, *Caupāī* 139, pp. 217-218.

8 *Ibid.*, Book 6, *Caupāī* 73, p. 400.

9 *Ibid.*, Book 7, *Dohā* 72, p. 465.

10 *VR(HPS)*, Vol. I, Book 1, Ch. 1-8, pp. 3-24.

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several lines of invocations[11], followed by a lengthy account of the relations between Śambhu (Śiva) and Bhavānī (Pārvatī)[12], the stories of Nārada and Manu Svāyambhuva to account for the incarnation of Viṣṇu on earth as Rāma[13], and the story of Paratāpabhānu to explain the birth of Rāvaṇa and his family as

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11 *RCM(H)*, pp. 1-22. The personages to whom Tulasīdāsa offers his homage include the gods (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Vināyaka and Śeṣa), the goddess (Vāṇī or Sarasvatī and Bhavānī), the *ādi-kavi* Vālmīki, his own guru Narahari, Rāma, his mother Kausalyā, his consort Sītā, Hanumān, Brahmans, saints, and even villains and wicked men. On the last-mentioned, Tulasīdāsa says : "I do homage to the feet of saints and wicked men alike; both cause pain, but with a difference; the absence of the former is like the pain of death, the latter torment us by their presence. They are born into the world together, but like the lotus and the leech their qualities are different. The good and the bad are like nectar and strong drink, begotten of one world as these (*amṛta* and *surā*), which arose from the churning of the deep ocean. The good and the bad, according to their deeds, win fair fame and infamy in full measure; the good are like nectar or the moon or *Gaṅgā*, the harmful like poison or fire of Karmanāśā. All know their merits and demerits, but whatever a man likes seems good to him; wherefore the good man follows after goodness and the vile man after vileness; nectar is praised for giving immortality, poison for causing death." *Ibid., Dohā* 4-5, *Caupāī* 5, p. 5.

12 *RCM(H), Dohā* 47-123, *Caupāī* 48-124, pp. 29-61.

13 *Ibid., Dohā* 125-151, *Caupāī* 125-152, pp. 61-72. According to the story of Nārada, Viṣṇu creates an illusory situation in which the sage Nārada is attracted by the beauty of King Śīlanidhi's daughter named Viśvamohinī. In order to win the hand of the princess, Nārada seeks the help of Viṣṇu in transforming him into a handsome suitor in the *svayamvara* contest. Viṣṇu, being in a mood for divine *līlā* or sport, makes Nārada look like a simian being without the sage becoming aware of it. The princess chooses Viṣṇu who appears in the guise of a handsome king. Two of Śiva's followers at the contest tell Nārada to look at his own image in a mirror. The bewildered sage becomes furious and curses them to be born as demons, and then he goes to Viṣṇu and curses him too in these words : "Assume the form as that in which you cheated me! That is my curse! You made me look like a monkey, so monkeys will be your helpers; you caused my dire disgrace, so you will sorrow for the loss of your wife." *Ibid., Caupāī* 137, p. 66. A variant form of this story appears in the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* as well as in the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* of Rāmānanda entitled *Rāmalīlā* ("Rāma's Sport"), as the tale of King Ambarīṣa and his beautiful daughter named Śrīmatī. See G. A. Grierson, "On the Adbhuta-Rāmāyaṇa, *"BSOAS*, Vol. IV, Pt. 1 (1926-1928), p. 13; also Dineschandra Sen. *The Bengali Rāmāyaṇas,* pp. 243-244. According to the story of Manu Svayambhuva, Viṣṇu grants Manu a great reward for the great austerities which he and his wife Śatarūpa have performed, and the reward is in fact a boon by which Manu will be born a king of Ayodhyā and Viṣṇu himself will be born as his son. *Ibid., Dohā* 141-151, *Caupāī* 142-152, pp. 68-72.

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demons.[14] Vālmīki's lengthy narration of legends relating to the story of Sagara and his sons, how Bhagīratha brought the *Gaṅgā* down from heaven, and how the gods and the titans fought for the *amṛta* or ambrosia after the churning of the ocean[15], is omitted by Tulasīdāsa, who only refers to the legends from time to time in the course of his poem.[16] There is also no suggestion in Tulasīdāsa's poem about the rivalry between the sages Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra as it is related by Śatānanda in Vālmīki's epic.[17] Again, the long accounts given by Vālmīki on certain episodes are condensed by Tulasīdāsa in a few verses[18], and, on the other hand, the narration of some events which

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[14] *RCM(H)*, Book 1, *Dohā* 152-176, *Caupāī* 153-176, pp. 72-82, Pratāpabhānu, a man of supreme wisdom and discernment, rules over the prosperous kingdom of Kekaya. However, as decreed by destiny, one day he goes on a hunting expedition to the dense forest of Vindhyācala where, while giving chase to mysterious wild boar, he loses his track and is forced to seek refuge in what appears to be a hermitage. Its occupant is a former enemy of the king who lives there in the guise of a hermit biding his time to take revenge upon Pratāpabhānu. The king does not know the 'hermit' though the 'hermit', knows the king. Believing his host to be a true hermit, the king asks him for a boon by which he will have no enemy to contend with; this boon is granted on the condition that the king shall avoid the wrath and curse of Brahmans. It is also agreed that the 'hermit' himself will assume the form of the royal priest to help in the preparation of food for a great banquet to which the king will invite thousands of Brahmans. The deceitful enemy of the king in the guise of the royal priest cooks the flesh of all kinds of animals which he also mingles with that of Brahmans for the banquet. The Brahmans come to know of this trick through a voice from heaven and they angrily curse the king and the entire royal household to be born as Rāvaṇa and his family of demons.

[15] *VR(HPS)*, Vol. 1, Book 1, Ch. 38-41, pp. 81-87; Ch. 42-44; pp. 88-93, Ch. 45-47, pp. 93-99.

[16] E.G., *RCM(H)*, Book 2, *Caupāī* 209, pp. 245-246.

[17] *VR(HPS)*, Vol. I, Book 1, Ch. 51-65, pp. 104-131.

[18] For example, the encounter between the headless titan Kabandha and Rāma soon after Rāvaṇa's abduction of Sītā is narrated by Vālmīki in great detail. Kabandha as a handsome youth obtains the boon of a long life from Brahmā and later he challenges Indra to a combat. Indra uses his thunderbolt to drive Kabandha's head and shoulders into his body. A huge mouth is opened in his belly and his arms are made four miles long so that he may catch creatures and devour them. Rāma meets him in the forest and slays him. At Kabandha's request Rāma cremates the body and he comes out of the fire in his original form and ascends to heaven *VR(HPS)*, Vol. II, Book 3, Ch. 69-73, pp. 144-155. Tulasīdāsa, however, refers only briefly to the slaying of Kabandha by Rāma, who also tells him that those who do sincere service to the Brahmans in thought, word and deed may command Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Śiva and all the other deities. *RCM(H)*, Book 3, *Dohā* 3, 3, *Caupāī* 31-32, p. 317.

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Vālmīki has dismissed in a few *ślokas* has been expanded by Tulasīdāsa.[19] The divergence of Tulasīdāsa's poem from the Sanskrit epic of Vālmīki is more marked in the seventh and last book (*Uttara-kāṇḍa*). Vālmīki's epic refers first to the dialogue between Rāma and the sage Agastya, who relates the story of Rāvaṇa's birth and his adventurous exploits; this account is followed by the story of Hanumān's childhood. The remainder of the book narrates the exile of Sītā and the events that preceded the great *Aśvamedha yāga* ("Horse Sacrifice") as well as the subsequent events including Rāma's recognition of his sons Kuśa and Lava born of Sītā in exile, Sītā's descent into the earth and Rāma's ascent to the heaven.[20] There is, however, no mention of these events in the epilogue of Tulasīdāsa's poem and its author substitutes for them the story of Kākabhuṣuṇḍi and long discourses on the nature of Viṣṇu and the Vaiṣṇavite faith.[21]

Yet another significant point of difference between the two poems is the fact that Tulasīdāsa has omitted to mention certain incidents and episodes of Vālmīki's work apparently because they offend the moral sense and would therefore appear inconsistent with the perfection that is depicted of the central character in his poem. Tulasīdāsa does not mention the unfilial

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[19] Vālmīki's description of Rāma's marriage to Sītā is minimal and it consists mainly of King Janaka's address to Rāma : "Here is my virtuous daughter Sītā, whom I bestow on thee; receive her and be happy; place her hand in thy hand; may she, faithful to her consort, be happy and follow him like a shadow!" *VR(HPS)*, Vol. I, Book 1, Ch. 73, p. 145. On the other hand, Tulasīdāsa's elaborate account of the wedding ceremony includes the descriptions of the gods' arrival, their admiration of the gorgeous pavilion, the wedding procession, the divine beauty of the couple, the performance of Vedic and social rites, the value of the dowry, the fun and merriment in the women's apartments, the wedding banquet, and even king Janaka's offer of *tāmbūla* (betel-leaf and areca-nut, or *pān*) to king Daśaratha and the other guests.. *RCM(H)*, Book I, *Dohā* 312-329, *Caupāī* 310-326, pp. 137-148.

[20] *VR(HPS)*, Vol. III, Book 7, Ch. 1-36, pp. 375-498; Ch. 37-111, pp. 499-636.

[21] *RCM(H)*, Book 7 (Epilogue), pp. 431-499, Kākabhuṣuṇḍi is a crow that has become a votary of Rāma after having heard the Rāma-story from Śiva while being his devotee. See *RCM(H)*, Book 1, *Caupāī* 30, p. 19. In the epilogue of his poem Tulasīdāsa makes Kākabhuṣuṇḍi relate the adventures of his former lives and also repeat the Rāma-story to Garuṛa (Garuḍa), the King of Birds, to resolve his doubts.

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remarks attributed by Vālmīki to Lakṣmaṇa when he becomes furious at his father's decision to exile Rāma[22], nor does he repeat Sītā's unkind suggestion that, because of Lakṣmaṇa's own selfish designs upon her, he refuses to go to Rāma's aid when he seems to be in danger while trying to track down the mysterious golden deer.[23] There is also no mention in his poem about Rāma's justification of his unethical act of killing Vāli that after all Vāli is only a monkey.[24] Most significant of all omissions is the story of Rāma's conduct in repudiating Sītā and later banishing her to the forest because of the slanderous allegations made by the people of Ayodhyā impugning her conjugal fidelity.[25] According to Vālmīki's version, Rāma refuses to accept Sītā after having rescued her from Rāvaṇa and causes her to undergo an ordeal by fire; Sītā is restored by the fire-god *Agni* while Rāma declares that he only acted thus to prove Sītā's innocence publicly.[26] Tulasīdāsa, on the other hand, takes care to protect Sītā's reputation from all possible stain by the device of causing the true Sītā to enter the fire so that Rāvaṇa abducts only her illusory form; the real Sītā returns from the fire when the substitute Sītā undergoes the ordeal by fire after she is rescued by Rāma from Rāvaṇa.[27] Moreover, there is no mention of Sītā's exile in Tulasīdāsa's poem.[28]

It would thus seem quite evident from the above that the *Rāmacaritamānasa* is certainly not a translation of the Sanskrit *Ādi-kāvya*, though Tulasīdāsa is known to have acknowledged

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22 *VR*(*HPS*), Vol. I, Book 2, Ch. 21, pp. 216-217.

23 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Book 3, Ch. 45, pp. 93-94.

24 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Book 4, Ch. 18, pp. 210-2123.

25 *Ibid.*, Vol. III, Book 6, Ch. 117, pp. 334-336; Book, Ch. 43-45, pp. 521-525

26 *Ibid.*, Vol. III, Book 6, Ch. 120, pp. 341-342.

27 *RCM*(*H*), Book 3, *Caupāī* 22, pp. 311; Book 6, *Dohā* 108, *Chanda* 33, pp. 422-423. It is believed that Tulasīdāsa adopted this device probably from the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* (III, 7, 1-4). *Ibid.*, p. xix. A similar device is also known to be employed by the authors of the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha-Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*, C.G.E. Grierson, "On the Adbhuta-Rāmāyaṇa," *BSOAS*, Vol. IV, Pt. 1 (1926-1928), p. 12. See also Ch. Vaudeville, *Etude sur les sources et la composition du Rāmāyaṇa de Tulsī-Dās* (Paris, 1955), p. 191.

28 The *Lavakuśakāṇḍa*, found in some editions of the *Rāmacaritamānasa* as the eighth book is not considred to be the work of Tulasīdāsa. See *RCM*(*H*), pp. xviii-xix and 516.

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Vālmīki's poem as one of the major sources on which he based his account of the Rāma story.[29]

The relationship of Tulasīdāsa's poem to the other sources has also been examined in a thorough manner by Prof. Charlotte Vaudeville among other and it would appear quite clear from her study that Tulasīdāsa has adopted several elements from many different sources such as the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa,* the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha-Rāmāyaṇa, Bhuśuṇḍi-Rāmāyaṇa,* the *Śiva-Purāṇa,* the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa,* the *Hanumān-Nāṭaka,* and Jayadeva's *Prasanna-Rāghava.*[30] In addition to these sources, we may also refer to the possibility of certain other Hindu versions of the Rāma story such as the Tamil version of Kamban having exerted some influence of Tulasīdāsa in the composition of his poem.[31]

Kamban's *Irāmāvatāram,* which is commonly known as *Kambarāmāyaṇam,* has been acclaimed to be the "greatest epic of Tamil literature"[32] and its author is also known by the title

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[29] *RCM(H),* Book 1, Śloka 14D, p. 11.

[30] Ch. Vaudeville, *Etude sur les sources et la composition du Rāmāyaṇa du Tulsī Dās* (Paris : Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient, 1955); traduction on hindi par J. K. Balbir 2 fasc. (Pondichery : Institut Francais d'Indologic, 1950 and 1965). Pandit Rām Naresh Tripāṭhī has listed in his Hindi edition of the *Rāmacaritamānasa* (Prayag : Hindi Mandir, Samvat 1992; A.D. 1936) some hundred passages from Tulasīdāsa's poem which echo verses in more than sixty works, among them the *Bhagavadgītā* (7 passages) and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (23 passages). *RCM(H),* p. xvi.

[31] See S. Shankar Raju Naidu, "Unique Contribution of Kambar and Tulasīdāsa," *Dr. R.P. Sethu Pillai Silver Jubilee Commemoration Volume* (Madras : Palaniappa Brothers, 1961), pp. 87-90.

[32] *Śrī Kambarāmāyaṇam,* with the commentry by V.M. Gopalakrishnamachariyar, 6 vols. Madras : V.M. Gopalakrishnamachariyar Co., 1957, hereinafter cites as *KR;* See also *Kaviccakkaravartti Kambar Iyaṛṛiya Irāmāyaṇam* edited by R.P. Sethuppillai and others. 6 Vols. Annamalainagar : Annamalai University, 1957-1970. Kamban's poem consists of 10,000 verses, or 40,000 lines, composed in more than ninety variations of three kinds of Tamil poetic metres, namely, *kali, viruttam,* and *tuṛai.* The entire work is divided into six *kāṇṭams* (Skt. *Kāṇḍa,* "Book" or major section) and each *kāṇṭam* is also subdivided into several *paṭalams* (Skt. *poṭala,* "Chapter" or minor section). Kamban's narration of the story concludes with the victorious return of Rāma and Sītā to Ayodhyā, and, as such, it does not deal with the later story of Rāma.

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Kaviccakkravarti ("Emperor of Poets").[33] The exact date of Kamban's poem is by no means certain, and there are a number of theories which advocate the 9th, 10th, or 12th century A.D. as the possible date of its composition. It would however seem that the most probable date for Kamban is the 12th century A.D.[34]

As for the relationship of Kamban's poem to *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa,* it would seem likely that Kamban adopted the main plot of the Rāma-story and several of its details from Vālmīki's work. However, as Prof. C. and H. Jesudasan have aptly remarked, this is the sum and substance of Kamban's debt to Vālmīki.[35] Indeed there are so many major and minor differences between Kamban's poem and the Sanskrit epic of Vālmīki that we can say emphatically that *Kambarāmāyaṇam* is certainly not a translation, nor is it an imitation of Vālmīki's poem.[36] On the contrary, Kamban's poem can be distinguished

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[33] T.P. Meenakshisundaram, *A History of Tamil Literature,* p. 102.

[34] C. Jesudasan and H. Jesudasan, *A History of Tamil Literature*, p. 157. Kamban, a native of Tiruvaḻuntūr in the Coḻa kingdom, is known to have been patronized by a chieftain named Caṭaiyan or Caṭaiyappan, to whom the poet refers in every thousandth verse of his poem by way of expressing his gratitude to his patron, *Ibid.,* pp. 184-185.

[35] See C. Jesudasan and H. Jesudasan, *op. cit.,* pp. 184-185; T.P. Meenakshisundaram, *op. cit.,* p.102; also S. Vijayapuri Pillai, *Tamilccuṭa-ramaṇikal*, pp. 127-149.

[36] The various divergencies of Kamban's poem from Vālmīki's epic are summarised in the introductory note of the following editions of Kamban's poem : "*Sri Kambarāmāyaṇam*, with the commentary by V.M. Gopala-krishnamachariyar, 6 Vols. (Madras : V.M. Gopalakrishnamachariyar Co.,) 1957; *Kaviccakkravartti Kambar Iyaṟṟiya Irāmāyaṇam,* edited by R.P. Sethuppillai and others (Annamalainagar : Annamalai University, 1957-1970). In additon, the following works also deal with the major differences between Kamban's poem and Vālmīki's epic: Nāmakkal V. Rāmalingam, *Kambarum Vālmīkiyum* (Madras, 1956); V.V. Aiyar, *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa—a study* (Bombay : Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), S. Singaravelu, "A comparative study of the Sanskrit, Tamil, Thai and Malay versions of the story of Rāma with special reference to the process of acculturation in the South-east Asian versions," *JSS*, Vol. LVI, Pt. 2 (July 1968), pp. 137-185.

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from the other Hindu versions of the Rāma-story including that of Vālmīki by virtue of its own characteristic features.[37]

Now, with regard to the relationship of *Kambarāmāyaṇam* to *Tulasi-Rāmāyaṇa*, it would seem apparent from the treatment of certain episodes occurring in the latter that the former had exerted certain amount of influence on Tulasīdāsa.[38] Thus for example, the theme of pre-marital love of Rāma and Sītā depicted by both Kamban and Tulasīdāsa is a striking example of the similarity, which, in fact, distinguishes their poems from the Sanskrit epic of Vālmīki. According to Kamban's *Irāmāvatāram* in Tamil, Rāma and Sītā see each other before the archery contest and they fall in love at this first sight[39]; even this is also said to represent the reunion of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī.[40] Similarly, Tulasīdāsa relates in his poem that Rāma and Sītā see each other in the flower-garden of King Janaka where she has gone to seek the blessings of the goddess Gaurī before the archery contest[41]; and their love at first sight is also said to be the renewal of Viṣṇu's love for Lakṣmī.[42]

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[37] A distinctive feature of Kamban's poem is its regional or local literary relevance. Thus, for example, Kamban's descriptions of the ideal Ikṣvāku kingdom of Kosala and its capital-city Ayodhyā, are highly reminiscent of the classical Tamil poets' portrayal of the five-fold landscape (*aintiṇai*) of the Tamil country. The codes of ethical conduct, which Kamban employs in his poem may also be traced to Tiruvaḷḷuvar's Tamil ethical treatise, *Tirukkuṛal*. Furthermore, his portrayal of the hero Rāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu evokes the devotional hymns of the Tamil Vaiṣṇavite Āḻvārs. See C. Jesudasan and H. Jesudasan, *A History of Tamil Literature*, pp. 158-163.

[38] This possibility is strengthened by the fact that South Indian sacred sites were among the places included in the itinerary of Tulasīdāsa when he went on a pilgrimage before returning to Ayodhyā where he began to compose his poem in 1574 A.D. See *RCM(H)*, p. x.

[39] *KR*, Book 1, Ch. 10, V. 35. An anonymous writer, who wrote a character-sketch of Sītā for inclusion in V.V.S. Aiyar's work (*Kamba Rāmāyaṇa—a study*, Bombay, 1965, pp. 287-316) has rendered Kamban's Tamil verses in English.

[40] *KR*, Book 1, Ch. 10, V. 38.

[41] See *RCM(H)*, Book 1, *Dohā* 226-234, *Caupāī* 224-232, pp. 103-106.

[42] *Ibid.*, Book 1, *Caupāī* 226, p. 104; also Book 2, *Caupāī* 139, pp. 217-218.

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Tulasīdāsa's treatment of certain other episodes also would seem to agree with that of Kamban, such similarity being again at variance with that of Vālmīki. Thus, for example, while Vālmīki makes Rāvaṇa's sister Śūrpaṇakhā appear in hideous form when she attempts to win Rāma's love in the forest[43], Kamban[44] and Tulasīdāsa[45], on the other hand, make Śūrpaṇakhā appear in the guise of a beautiful maiden, and this portrayal would seem to accord well with her attempt to seduce Rāma.

Now, on the question of the possible relationship of the *Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa* to the Thai *Rāmakien*[46] of King Rāma I, we find that the motif of depicting the pre-marital love of Rāma and Sītā, which forms a notable feature of both the

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[43] *VR(HPS)*, Vol. II, Book 3, Ch. 17, p. 39: "Beholding the hero (Rāma) the equal of Indra, the rākṣasī (the demoness Śūrpaṇakhā) was overwhelmed with desire. Rāma was handsome; she hideous; his waist was slender, hers thick and heavy; he had large eyes, hers squinted; his locks were beautiful, hers were red; his whole appearance was pleasing, hers repellent. Rāma's voice was sonorous, hers strident; he was fair and youthful, she old and haggard; he was amiable, she sullen; he was self-controlled, she unruly; he ws captivating, she odious."

[44] *KR*, Book 3, Ch. 5, V. 30-31. According to Kamban (*KR*. Book 3, Ch. 5, V. 31), Śūrpaṇakhā comes into Rāma's presence in the form of a beautiful young creeper-like maiden of lotus-flower-like feet, and her gait resembles that of peacock and swan. One could even perhaps listen to the joyous and dance-like rhythm of her gait while following the regular metrical pattern sound in the following relevant verse of Kamban :

(pañci oḷir viñcu kuḷir pallavam anuṅkac
ceñceviya kañcamnimir cīṛaṭiyal āki,
añcol ila mañña ena, annam ena, minnum
vañci ena, nañcam ena vañca makal vantāḷ)

[45] *RCM(H)*, Book 3, *Caupāī* 16, p. 306.

[46] Rāma-I, King of Thailand, *Rāmakian Pharartchaniphon Ratchakan-Thi 1*. (The Rāmakian of the First Reign, the Thai version of the Rāmāyaṇa). 4 vols. Bangkok : Chabap Khruusapha (Teachers' Association edition) 1951. Thai text). For a summary translation of this work in English, see *Rāmakīrti (Rāmakien), or the Thai version of the Rāmāyaṇa*. Summary translation by Swami Satyanandapuri and Charoen Sarahiran. Bangkok : Dharmashrama, 1940; reprinted, Bangkok : Thai Bharat Cultural Lodge and Satyanandapuri Foundation, 1949; also R.A. Olsson, *The Rāmakian*. A prose translation, of the Thai version of Rāmāyaṇa. Bangkok : Praepitaya Co. Ltd., 1968.

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Kambarāmāyaṇam and the *Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa,* occurs also in the Thai *Rāmakien.*[47] It would, indeed, seem possible that the popular motif could have been adopted by the royal author of the Thai version from earlier sources such as the *Kambarāmāyaṇam* and the *Tulasī Rāmāyaṇa.* Such a possibility is strengthened by the fact that the sources chosen by King Rāma I for the composition of the Thai *Rāmakien* are known to have included a Tamil as well as a Hindi version, in addition to the Bengali version and some of the earlier South-east Asian versions of the Rāma-story.[48] This question may be explored further by a detailed comparison of the treatment of the motif in the three versions concerned and, for this purpose the relevant passages of the three versions may be summarised as follows :

(a) *Kambarāmāyaṇam* (Book 1, Ch. 10, V.1-61)

When Rāma, accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa and the sage Viśvāmitra, entered the city of Mithilā, its golden walls shone like red lotus flower because beautiful Sītā—the goddess of wealth Lakṣmī—had chosen the city as her abode. The royal visitors saw pretty flags and streamers adorning the multi-sculptured mansions. Flags on sturdy poles fluttered briskly as if

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The term *Rāmakien* (which is the Thai pronounciation of the word *Rāmakīrti* meaning "Rāma's Glory") is the name of the poetic version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Thai language, composed by the founder of the present Cakri dynasty of Thailand, namely, king Phra Phuttha Yotfa, or Rāma I (reigned 1782-1802 A.D.). Though there are some surviving fragments of Thai texts containing brief accounts of certain episodes of the Rāma-story dating back to earlier times (see P. Schweisguth, *Etude sur la litterature siamoisn.* Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1951, pp. 395-397), nevertheless the *Rāmakien* of King Rāma I is acknowledged to be the earliest known complete literary version of the Rāma-story in Thai language. Subsequently, dramatic versions are known to have been composed by King Phra Phuttha Lootla, or Rāma II in 1815, and by king Vajiravudh, or Rāma VI in 1910. On the evidence of the popularity of the Rāma-story in the form of Thai folk-lore, see Phya Anuman Rajadhon (Sathien Koset), *Upakorn Rāmakien,* Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, B.E. 2495 (A.D. 1952) (Thai text).

[47] *Rāmakian Phraracthaniphon Ratchakan Thil,* Vol. I, Book 14, pp. 381-821.

[48] C. Velder, "Notes on the saga of Rāma in Thailand." *JSS,* Vol. LVI, Pt. 1 (1968), p. 36.

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they signified the city itself waving its arms to welcome Rāma of lotus-like eyes with the greetings : "Come thou quickly! Come thou quickly!"...

The windows at the upper-storey of the royal mansion with young maidens present there glittered as though there were so many moons. .....

When Rāma stopped briefly at the coutryard, where the majestic swans were to be seen, he saw Sītā of golden splendour, flowery fragrance, honeyed sweetness and melodious joy. As the charming damsel stood by the window of the lofty mansion above, her eyes met with the eyes of Rāma who stood below, and their hearts were united. They were bound together by the first glance, and they became of one self. It was indeed the moment of their reunion since the time they had parted at the primordial abode of the dark ocean. As Rāma moved from the scene with his mind full of fond recollections of lovely Sītā, Sītā herself became delirious with love for Rāma.

(b) *Tulasīkṛta-Rāmāyaṇa* [*RCM*(*H*), Book 1, Caupai 209-232, pp. 97-106] :

When Rāma beheld the beauty of the city of Mithilā, he and his brother Lakṣmaṇa were delighted beyond measure. ....

The gods stood astounded to behold the luxurious splendour of King Janaka's incomparable palace. .....

The above description is followed by an account of the meeting between the sage Viśvāmitra and King Janaka in the company of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa; subsequently Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are said to have gone on a sight-seeing tour of the city when the citizens of Mithilā had a great opportunity to see the royal visitors. It was on the following morning that when Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa had gone to the garden of the city, Rāma saw Sītā who had also gone there to worship at Gaurī's shrine.

None guessed the love that had been theirs of old (Rāma being an incarnation of Viṣṇu and Sītā of Lakṣmī). Sītā called to mind the words of Nārada (who had told her that she would meet Rāma her future husband in the garden), and pure love was born in her bosom. Startled, she looked this way and that, like a frightened fawn. Hearing the tinkle of her bracelets and

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anklets and the bells on her girdle, Rāma pondered in his heart and said to Lakṣmaṇa, "It sound as though love were beating his drum, ambitious to vanquish the world!" So saying, he turned and looked in that direction, and his eyes were fixed on Sītā's face as the partridge gazes on the moon. Motionless stayed his beauteous eyes. When Sītā saw Rāma's graceful form her eyes were filled with longing, and were so glad as though they had looked upon their treasure. She was faint with excess of love, like the partridge when she looks on the autumn moon.

She drew Rāma into her heart by the pathway of her eyes and carefully closed on him the door of her eyelids. Pretending to look back at a deer or bird or a tree, she turned again and again, and each time she beheld the beauty of Rāma, her love grew even greater. Thinking how hard it was to break the bow of Śiva, she went silently sobbing on her way, and laid upon her heart his dark-hued image. When Rāma saw Sītā departing, that mine of joy and love and beauty and virtue, then with the gentle ink of deep devotion he traced her fair form on the tablet of his soul.

(c) *King Rāma I's Rāmakien* (Vol. I, Book 14, pp. 381-382)

Rāma together with Lakṣmaṇa and the sage Viśvāmitra crossed over the stream and proceeded along the meadow in their journey through the great forest, and arrived at the mighty city of Mithilā, and directly entered the city's gates.

Rāma looked intently at the city of Mithilā which was gay like the joyful heavenly land. There were edifices, mansions and shops situated nearly along the avenues. There were gay and noisy crowds of citizens, both men and women. There were stables for elephants and horses, and also arenas in which the mighty elephants tested their strength.

There were rows of flags, hoisted upon the poles and the tiered royal umbrellas; the flags were waving and shining forth as though they were beckoning the royal visitor with the words, "We beseech Your Majesty to be gracious enough to make haste and proceed; Your Majesty will have the gracious maiden Sītā."

Bewildering and being in a doubtful frame of mind as to what was in store for him, the royal visitor walked on at the

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same time casting his glance to look at the royal palace which was like the mansion of Indra. The five towers of crystal combined with gold shone with the gabled roofs and golden images on four directions, supported by the figures of *nāga* standing upright.

Rāma admired the golden crystal gem at the royal window, unforgettably beautiful like the goddess, and his eyes met with those of Sītā; glamorous charms combined to bind their hearts tightly together.

Thus, the youthful Sītā on the upper storey of the mansion, rejoicing and glancing furtively across the aperture of the latticed window triumphantly while being hidden, her royal eyes met with those of Rāma. Love, till then restrained, gushed forth, as Sītā (as Lakṣmī) was indeed accustomed to be seated at the feet of her lord in her previous existence. Boundless love and longings sprang forth in the heart of the young and beautiful maiden just now.

Thus, Rāma conferred his blessings of boundless love on the auspicious maiden, like fire touching her heart, and he could not stop to gaze intently, but looked only for a moment and at the same time not seeming to look, before Lakṣmaṇa could call him to attention; he turned and walked, at the same time having a glance at the balcony window with longing and love, and proceeded along with the sage until they arrived at the hall of ceremonies.

Thus, elegant Sītā fell in love at the very first sight of Cakrī, the Ruler with the Wheel (*Cakra*), upon whom she had not placed her eyes directly, but only glanced sideways through the corner of her eyes, looking furtively. She now suffered much from great pangs of love; she disliked everything; she moaned and groaned. She did not see Rāma returning the same way again. The youthful maiden was sorrowful and longed for him. When she was questioned by someone who wanted to know what was wrong with her she felt bashful and could not utter any word. Countless memories of the earthly lord came into her mind. Love bound them both together.

A comparison of the summarised accounts relating to the pre-marital love of Rāma and Sītā as found in the three versions of the Rāma-story would seem to reveal that there are both similarities and divergences in the literary treatment of the motif.

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Thus, for example, the authors of all the three versions have described the various special features of the capital city Mithilā, such as the avenues, market place or shops, stables, sporting arenas, and beautiful mansions. Another notable similarity found in the three versions is the reference to Rāma and Sītā being the incarnation of the deity Viṣṇu and his consort Lakṣmī, respectively. Most important of all the parallels to be found in the three versions is the description of the scene in which Rāma and Sītā fall in love at first sight.

As for the divergences occurring in the *Rāmacaritamānasa*, its author Tulasīdāsa would seem to have introduced an innovation by narrating first the sight-seeing tour of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in the city of Mithilā, followed by the account of their visit on the following day to the garden of Mithilā, where Rāma and Sītā see each other and fall in love at first sight.

The innovations introduced by the royal author of the Thai *Rāmakien* relate to the description of royal mansions having gabled roofs decorated with the *nāga* or *makara* motif—a feature that has been typical of the Thai architectural tradition. Furthermore, the description of flags fluttering from the multi-tiered staff of royal umbrellas seems to be an additional refinement, which is again significant in the context of the multi-tiered royal umbrella being an important part of the royal regalia in Thailand.

It would thus seem from the above examples that in the matter of literary acculturation the final treatment of any given motif often rests with the authors of the individual literary works even though they could have adopted such a motif from certain earlier sources, and also that the combination of such an adopted motif with the local cultural elements could produce a kaleidoscopic effect. The adopted motifs would be bits of coloured gems, and when shaken or rearranged, they would fall into a variety of attractive forms. Thus, the treatment of the popular motif, namely the premarital love of Rāma and Sītā as found in the Tamil version of King Rāma I, would seem to indicate not only the possible relationship among the three versions, but also the individual literary genius of the three famous poetic authors of the ever-popular Rāma-story.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BSOAS, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

ERE—Enclyclopedia of Religion and Ethics; edited by James Hastings. 12 Vols. Ediburgh : T.T. Clarke, 1908-1921.

HPS(VR)—Hari Prasad Shastri (Trans.), *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* translated into English by Hari Prasad Shastri. 3 Vols. London : Shant Sadan, 1952-1959.

IAY—Indian Antiquary.

JAS—Journal of Asian Studies, Ann Arbor, Michigan, U.S.A.

JRAS—Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, London, England.

JSS—Journal of the Siam Society, Bangkok, Thailand.

KR—Sri Kambarāmāyaṇam, with the commentary by V.M. Gopalakrishnamachariar. 6 Vols. 6th edition, Madras : V.M. Gopalakrishnamachariar Co., 1959. (First published, 1894-1932). (Tamil Text).

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RCM(H)—The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rāma. An English translation of Tulasīdāsa's Rāmacaritamānasa, by W. Douglas P. Hill. Calcutta : Oxford University Press, 1952.

TR—Thai Rāmakien.

VR—Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa.

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BHUŚUṆḌI RĀMĀYAṆA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE MEDIEVAL RĀMĀYAṆA LITERATURE

By **BHAGWATI PRASAD SINGH**

The life history of Rāma has been a living tradition and common repository of the ancient heritage of this great land ever since the date of its inception in the form of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by Vālmīki. It has helped in galvanising the ideas and ideals of peoples of this sub-continent, apparently heterogeneous in blood, language and religion, through its unique flexibility and catholicity.

What has been said above is proved by the works based on the story of Rāma as expounded at the three levels of its evolution—historical, literary and sectarian. Vālmīki handled the story of Dāśarathi Rāma; Bhāsa, Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti and Kumāradāsa portrayed Rāma as a great man, possessing human sentiments, where Kamban, Krittivāsa and Tulasīdāsa, soaked in Vaiṣṇava Bhakti, presented in a very touching style the sage and the sports of Rāma abounding in popular traits. *Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa* is an important link of this great tradition.

Causes of its Obscurity

It is very surprising that, despite being first and foremost among the sectarian Rāmāyaṇas from the point of view of historicity, it has hitherto remained in the limbo of oblivion. Heuristic scholars of Rāmakathā and Rāma Bhakti like Sir George Grierson, L.P. Tessitory, P.C. Bagchi, Charlotte Vaudeville and the poets and commentators devoted to Rāma like Ram Charan Das, Rasik Bihari and Anjani Nandan Sharan have been, time and again, spelling out the strong possibility of its existence; but the work could not see the light of the day. There may be two reasons : forcelessness or occultism. A study of the relevant literture shows that the latter is the main cause constituted by several factors.

Rāma's love-play and esoteric Bhakti have been given prominence in Bhuśuṇḍi's work. The love-aspect of Rāma has been advocated as a secret by the propounders of the sect. It is

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the object of mental worship or inner accomplishment of only the chosen worshippers, and not of external or practical adoration, and hence the idea of its general propagation has been expressly objected to :

एतामैकान्तिकीं लीलां यो ब्रूयादनधिकारिणे ।
स पच्येत महाघोरे नरके दैवचोदितः ॥ [1]

वाचकान् घातयिष्यामि मातृजारप्रसङ्गवत् ।
अधिकारिणमालोक्य कथंचित् कथयामहे ॥ [2]

Hanumatsamhitā, an accepted work of the sect, also holds that the love element, inherent in the Avatāra Līlā of Rāma, is not the subject of popular propaganda.[3] Consequently, the work continued to be recited and listened to in the limited circle of the Rāma Bhaktas of the *Rasika* cult. The heads of the temples preserved it as a traditional secret. So the question of its publication never rose.

Discovery of the Manuscripts

In the course of my investigation of literature on Rāma Bhakti, I came across the first manuscript of *Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa* (*BR*) on October 24, 1955, through the courtesy of Shri Sītā Ram Sharan, the then Mahant of Lakshman Kila of Ayodhyā. This MS. is dated 1922 V.E. It was slightly torn and incomplete; so efforts to find out the complete copy were continued. Incidentally, two more manuscripts were recovered at Ayodhyā through the kindness of Mahatma Saryu Sharan of Nritya Raghava Kunj. They were comparatively older than the first. One of them was written in 1899 V.E. at Rewa, and the other in 1779 V.E. at Mathurā. Besides, a small book named 'Śrī Sītā Rāma Yugala Sahasranāma', forming part of *BR*, was procured from the personal library of the Maharaja of

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1 *Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa,* Pūrva. 25-46.
2 *Ibid.,* Pūrva. 25/14.
3 रसिकानां हृदाह्लादकारिणीं पावनीं कथाम् ।
गुह्याद्गुह्यतरं दिव्यं तव प्रीत्या वदाम्यहम् ॥
—*Hanumat Samhitā,* 2/7, 11

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Balrampur (U.P.). It was undated. The fourth[3a] and complete manuscript of the work in question was made available at the Oriental Institute, Baroda, through the courtesy of Dr. B. Sandesara.

It is evident from the foregoing details of the places from which the manuscripts of *BR* were obtained, that the work had an extensive circulation in different regions of Northern India, and that the tradition of its worship, copying, recitation, and listening among the devotees was continuing.[4]

The Title and the Tradition of Its Narrative

Three titles of the book have been mentioned in the extant manuscripts : *Ādi Rāmāyaṇa*[5], *Brahma Rāmāyaṇa* and *BR*. It is called *Ādi Rāmāyaṇa* owing to its descent in the heart of the creator of the universe in a state of Samādhi during the Brahma Kalpa; *Brahma Rāmāyaṇa,* because it deals with the Avatāra Līlā of Rāma, the Supreme Brahman; and *Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa,* for it came into being for the sake of quenching the inquisitiveness of Bhuśuṇḍi. But ultimately, the last of the three, *i.e., BR,* received universal recognition. References to this work have been made under this nomenclature in the writings of oriental and occidental scholars, as also in such sectarian titles

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[3a] Based on these four mss. Dr. B.P. Singh has brought out the ed. of *Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa,* Pūrva Khanda (Vishvavidyalaya Prakashan, Varanasi, 1975).

[4] भूमौ स्वस्तिकमालिख्य सर्वतोभद्रमेव वा ।
मण्डलं विपुलं तत्र स्थापयेज्जानकीपतिम् ।।
वाचयेत् तत्र विधिवद्ग्रन्थमेनं समाहितः ।
अनन्यभक्त्या श्रोतव्यं सर्वदा रामसेवकैः ।।
लिखित्वा पुस्तकं चैतद्दक्षिणाहेमसंयुतम् ।
रामभक्ताय यो दद्याद् ब्राह्मणाय सुसज्जने ।।
तस्य पुण्यफलं चापि वक्तुं नो शक्यते मया ।
—B.R. Uttara 53, p. 63

[5] Dr. V. Raghavan in course of his work on the *New Catalogus Catalogorum* found some MSS. under the titles *Ādi Rāmāyaṇa* and *Kāka Bhuśuṇḍi* but after analysis he came to the conclusion that they were different from the present one. (See 10.3704, *RASB*, V. 3208, Hpr. II. 64)

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as 'Śrī Sītā Rāma Sahasranāma', 'Rāma-Nava-Ratna-Sāra-Saṅgraha', and 'Rāma Carita Mānasa Ki Nigamagini Ṭikā'. To me it appears that the other two titles could not be accepted because there was some possibility of the diffusion of misunderstanding through them. The epic of Vālmīki, being the first *Rāmāyaṇa* to be composed, has been known as 'Ādi Rāmāyaṇa'. The title 'Brahma Rāmāyaṇa' would have been emblematic of the Līlā of Nirguṇa Rāma rather than the Avatāra Līlā of Rāma, the son of Daśaratha.

Custodians and Recipients

The tradition of speakers and recipients as depicted in *BR* is somewhat different from that of other Rāmāyaṇas. According to the present text this story was first of all narrated by Rāma to Sītā in Pramoda Vana. Sītā communicated it to Lakṣmaṇa, and then from Lakṣmaṇa it passed on to Bharata. Hanumān at some time, received it from Rāma. Subsequently, the oral tradition continued from Brahmā to Hayagrīva and Bhuśuṇḍi, and from Hayagrīva to Agastya. Reference, in this work, has also been made here and there to "Rāmakathās" composed by Vāyu, Śiva, Śeṣa, Śukadeva, Atri and Vasiṣṭha. The five authorities of Rāma-story as mentioned are : Bhuśuṇḍi, Garuḍa, Pṛthvī, Lakṣmaṇa, and Hanumān. There is also a third tradition according to which its exposition is made to pass on from Brahmā to Bhuśuṇḍi, from Bhuśuṇḍi to Dālbhya and from Dālbhya to Lomaśa. In this way innumerable Rāmāyaṇas (Rāmāyaṇam Anantakam) came into existence. The Rāmakathā as handed down in the present tradition came to be produced in five Samhitās. *Hanumatsamhitā* is one of them. BR running into thirty-six ślokas contains the essence of all the five Samhitās.

The idea which has, for the first time, become manifest in the present book is that Bhuśuṇḍi[6], Garuḍa[7], and Lomaśa were distinguished devotees of Rāma. They have made major contribution to the story and spiritual Rāmakathās written in

6 *BR*, Pūrva, 25/41-43.
7 *Ibid.*, Pūrva, 6/13.

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different languages in general and the content of later Rāmāyaṇas, specially Tulasi's *Rāmacaritamānasa.*

Author

Even a thorough perusal of the work does not help us to trace its author anywhere, in any form. It appears that the great man merged the transcendental light of his practical genius in the all-pervasive individuality of Brahmā, the divine narrator. It is, therefore, an additional link in the chain of the self-absorbed authors of Purāṇas, Smṛtis, and epics under the mask of Vyāsa, Vālmīki, and Śukadeva.

Sources of Inspiration

Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Rāmānukrīḍā* are the germinal sources of the present work.[8] The latter one now exists in name only. Besides, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has the geatest shaping influence on it. Kṛṣṇakathā and Kṛṣṇa Bhakti, as depicted in the *Bhāgavata,* have so deeply coloured the *Rāma Charit,* that the Rāmakathā of *BR*, at some places, appears only to be a transformation of the *Bhāgavata* text. The geographical descriptions given therein are also reflective of the author's close familiarity with the Braj Pradesh[9] and strong attachment with Kṛṣṇa Līlā. *Bhāgavata,* Vedānta, *Brahmasūtra* and *Pañcaratnasamhitās* are the main sources of the present author, from the point of view of ideology. Dr. V. Raghavan has pointed out that there is apparent impact of the *Gīta Govinda* and *Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛta*[10] on the descriptions of amorous scenes in the *BR.*

Planning of Chapters

The divisions of the narrative of epics into Kāṇḍa, Chapter, Canto, and Prakaraṇa, etc., has been in vogue in conformity with the Indian tradition. But in the present work there is a departure from this practice. It is divided into four Khaṇḍas or parts or books, namely Pūrva, Paścima, Dakṣiṇa and Uttara. To my mind, the tāntrika principles pervading the entire text lie at

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8 *BR*, Pūrva, 9/14.

9 *Ibid.*, Pūrva, pp. 529-854.

10 *BR*, Introduction, p. 19.

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the root of this scheme. The identity of five Dhyāni Buddhas is established in the Buddhistic scriptures of Nepal. They are : Virocana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddha. They owe their existence to Swayambhū or Ādi Buddha, according to the Mahāyānīs; and they are assigned to the four directions, and one inhering the higher Brahmāṇḍa. The Śāktas perhaps, having drawn inspiration from it, have referred to six[11] forms of Mahāśakti present in all the four directions and the upper Āmnāya. It proves that in the Bhāgavata Sampradāya, the above Buddhistic and Śākta ideology was accepted in its original form. This is also confirmed by the fact that the later Oriya Vaiṣṇava Bhaktas have interpreted Mahā Viṣṇu, the controller of all the Viṣṇus, as presiding over the four directions, and as present in the upper sphere as Vaikuṇṭha Nātha and they have termed this upper place of his abode as Vaikuṇṭha Loka.[12]

Date of Composition

There is no mention of the date of its composition in the work in conformity with the great tradition of the ancient Indian authors. The information one gathers from its extant copies is that it had come to be known at the principal seats of Bhakti in Northern India. But, unfortunately, all the four above-mentioned manuscripts have no reference to their ideal and standard manuscript. And hence no exploration has been possible of the period of its composition through the establishment of the continuity of the transcripts.

The Influence of Pre-Medieval Cults

The Śaiva, Śākta, and Vaiṣṇava sects of the pre-mediaeval period seem to have exercised considerable influence on the arrangement of the plot and the enunciation of the spiritual elements contained therein.

The Tāntrik Sādhanā of the Śaiva, Śākta and Buddhistic Sects

An analysis of the history of early Vaiṣṇavism reveals the fact that the whole of Northern India was oppressively dominated by the tāntric ideology from the 3rd to the 12th

[11] *Tantri Sāhitya,* M.M. Pt. Gopinath Kaviraj, Introduction, p. 27.
[12] *Bhakti Mārgī Bauddha Dharma,* p. 112.

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century A.D. The mystical practices of the Vajrayāni and Sahajayāni Buddhists of the subsequent period, and the Kāpālikas and Kaulas of the contemporary generation had reached the peak-point of their evolution. Priority was accorded to the male power in the Śaiva Tantras and to the female power in the Śākta Tantras. Various systems of worship of the Yugnaddha or united and erotic form had come into vogue. The Northern Kaulas defined and determined the balanced and integrated form of Kula (Śakti) and Akula (Śiva) as the ultimate objective of their spiritual attainment. Its acquisition, in the process of accomplishment, accrued from the union of kuṇḍalinī existent of Mūlādhāra, and Śiva resting in Sahasrāra. The writer of *Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa* has adopted most of the basic elements of these occult religious practices and has utilized them in poetic descriptions and characterization.

Kāpālikas

The Śākta Tāntrikas, who believed the Śakti-Nātha Siva to be the object of knowledge and Śakti to be the aim of devotion, were known as Kāpālikas. They were worshippers of the Caṇḍī or the Mahiṣā-mardinī form of Śakti. 'Śmaśāna Sādhanā' was the cheif ingredient of their practice. *BR* makes a mention of the Caṇḍī-worship as performed by the Vaiṣṇavas on the 8th day of Navarātrī.[13] It appears to be the outcome of the contemporary Kāpālika thought. It is quite possible that such a kind of synthetic trend came into existence due to the followers of the Śaiva-Śākta sect being initiated into the Vaiṣṇava cult. Not only this, there are descriptions of the costumes and conduct of the Kāpālikas in different contexts. Carrying Kapāla and Khaṭvāṅga and drinking liquor[14] were the principal features of their Sādhanā. These distinct aspects of the Śaiva Kāpālikas have been narrated in the Jain *Mahāpurāṇa* of Puṣpadanta, *Mālatī-Mādhava* of Bhavabhūti, and *Sandeśa Rāsaka* of Abdur Rahman. This sect had the dominating influence about the 10th century A.D.

The Yoginikaul Cult

The worship of Śakti or woman was its distinguishing feature. Several elements of Kāpālikas and Buddhistic sects had

[13] *BR*, Pūrva, 133/27.

[14] *Ibid.*, Pūrva, 163/11, 16.

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been adopted in it. The Kaulas had great influence in Northern India before the advent of the Nāth Yogis. Matsyendra Nāth was the follower of this very school. *BR* has referred to Sītā as "Yoginī Paramakalā"[15] probably under the influence of this Vāma-Mārgī sect.

The Kaulas believed in Sahaja Sādhanā because enjoyment (bhoga) is the natural trait or Sahaja-Bhāva of human character. Indulgence, therefore, was accepted as the way of life. The chief object of the Sahajānandi Kaulācāryas was to lead the Sādhakas from attachment to detachment or from 'bhoga' to 'yoga'. Pañca Makāra and Cakra-Pūjā formed the main part of their worship. They believed that it was possible through this method to attain the state of perfrect equipoise or Sāmarasya which is synonymous with Sahajānanda. Matsyendra, in *Akula Vēra Tantra*[16], has named this metasensual knowledge as the source of attainment of the Advaita status. This Śākta sect, by accepting the incarnation of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa as the manifestations of Śakti, has made a commendable effort to attract the Vaiṣṇavas towards their system. Further, it identified Rāma with supreme Siva, and Sītā with Gaurī, and considered 'Rāmanāma' as connotative of the supreme Brahman—

राम: परशिवो ज्ञेयो नाऽवतारो नरोऽपि च ।
यत्परं ब्रह्म विख्यातं तद्रामेत्यक्षरद्वयम् ।।[17]

This enjoyment-based spiritual practice, as adopted by the Śāktas to decoy the Vaiṣṇavas into their fold, was a psychological feat. It had endangered the long-established ethical tradition of Vaiṣṇavism. That is why the earlier Vaiṣṇava poets—Nāmadeva, Kabir, Sūrdās and Tulasī had vehemently denounced the Śāktas.

Obscene descriptions of the worship of sex[18] and nude female beauty[19] found in the pre-mediaeval Vaiṣṇava and secular

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15 *Ibid.*, Pūrva, 14/29.
16 *Advaya Vajra Samgraha*, p. 63.
17 *Śakti Sangama Tantra.*
18 सर्वालंकारसंयुक्ता विवस्त्रां पूजयेत् प्रिये । —*Vira Cūḍāmaṇi*
19 सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य योनिपूजारतो भवेत् । —*Prema Toṣiṇī*

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literature may directly be linked with the worship of sex and naked women as started by Kaula Tāntrikas. It has a discernible impact on *Hanumannāṭaka, Jānakīharaṇa, Gītagovinda,* etc.

The passion inspiring the erotic play of Sahjānandinī Sītā carried on with Rāma, has been termed as Sahajānanda in *BR*, and the exotic eroticism of the Agnikumāras reborn as Gopikās is confirmed through the abandonment of family dignity and ethos as prescribed by the Kaulacāryas—

अथ प्रादुरभूत् कामः सहजानन्दलक्षणः ।
जानकीं वेपयामास सहजानन्दरूपिणीम् ।।

—*BR*, Pūrva, 26/7

Reference in this context has also been made to Rāma's 'Nidhuvana[20] Krīḍā' which became the main part of the practice of later Vaiṣṇavas. The abundance of the descriptions of female beauty and Surata Krīḍā[21] in the present work also shows the author being influenced by the system of the fore-mentioned esoteric Sādhanā.

The Siddhas

There were three categories of these self-accomplished persons: Kaula Siddhas, Buddhistic Siddhas and Nātha Siddhas. The first were connected with the Yoginī Kaula sect of Matsyendra Nāth, the second with the Sahajayāna line of the Mahāyāna Buddhistic order, and the third with the Gorakh Panth. All the three exercised their magical feats, as freely assuming the self-willed bodies, and easily moving through heavenly spheres, by virtue of the spiritual power acquired through various modes of Yoga Sādhanā. *BR* has numerous allusions made to the Yogis, demonstrating the magic of their marvellous acquisitions.[22] They were the roving doctors of the devil-haunted mortals. The account of an incident relating to the use of 'Stambhana Mantra' by Siddha Yogi in the person of Siva is given in the present work.[23]

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[20] *BR*, Pūrva, 28/19.
[21] *Ibid.*, Pūrva, 27/21-24.
[22] *BR*, Pūrva 54/18, 58/67, 68, 74.
[23] *BR*, Pūrva 123/59-70.

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The eating of meat, in the process of accomplishment, was prevalent among the Buddhistic and Śākta Siddhas, excepting the Nāth ones. This practice of theirs happened to be in contravention of the code of Vaiṣṇavas. But the author of *BR* has shown all the main characters—the hero Rāma, his life-partner Sītā, and his brother Lakṣmaṇa—taking interest in meat-eating, particularly during the fourteen-year period of their exile. It is emblematic of the fact that this tendency had not decreased till the period of the composition of the work, as it did after the Vaiṣṇava Bhakti movement. It is true that the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* also contains an account of Rāma taking meat, but this historical fact had vanished with the passage of time. Non-violence was an indispensable aspect of the Vaiṣṇava practice. All the earlier Rāmāyaṇas—*Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa, Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa, Rāmcaritmānasa, Bhāvārtha Rāmāyaṇa* and *Ubhaya-Prabodhaka Rāmāyaṇa,* etc., have depicted violence as a diabolic passion and have shown all the main characters of the epic as refraining from it.

It is thus evident that in the 9th and 10th centuries A.D., the religious life of Northern India was being highly influenced by Śākta and Buddhistic Tāntric code. There is another strong evidence of it in our work namely the introduction of Sahaja[24] and Tārā[25] as the Śaktis of Rāma. In the *Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa,* we come across the scheme of their Pūjā, Mantra, Tantra, etc., in keeping with the Śākta and Buddhistic Tāntrik doctrines.

This impact of Tāntrik thought-currents on social life, is traceable to the reign of the Chandelas and Gaharwaras in Northern India. This is confirmed through the construction of the 'Chausath Yogini Temple' by the Chandelas at Khajuraho, the Tāntric leaning of Kumar Devi, wife of Govinda Chandra Deva, the Gaharwar ruler, and Jai Chandra's faith in Vajrayāna. Besides, the fact that these rulers had faith in Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism also, indicates that the popular mind was gradually getting inclined towards the other contemporary progressive sects with the waning of the influence of the Tāntrik ideologies. Chandra Deva, the Gaharwar Ruler, had offered a 'Tulā' charity in gold equal to his weight (Tulādāna) about 1100 A.D. at the

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[24] *BR*, Pūrva, 150/39.

[25] *Ibid.*, 150.

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Ādi Keśava Temple of Kashi, whereas Jai Chandra got himself initiated into Kṛṣṇa Bhakti in 1168 A.D.[26] *BR* in the context of Daśaratha's pilgrimage, has also made a reference to the Darśan of Mārkaṇḍeya Mahādeva[27] and of Viśveśwara[28] of Kāshī Kṣetra. All this tends to show that these Śaiva centres had acquired public recognition by the time of the composition of the present work.

The Influence of Śrī Vaiṣṇava Sect

Śrī Vaiṣṇava cult as founded by Rāmānuja proved to be main guiding force for propagation of Rāma Bhakti and the Rāma Kathā. The *Kālinjara Māhātmya* contains the descriptions of Jānakī-śayyā, Sītā Kuṇḍa and Saumitra Kṣetra, centres of Rāma worship built by the Chandela Rulers of 11th century A.D. It proves that an atmosphere congenial to the expansion of Rāma Bhakti too was available during the renaissance of Vaisnavism. Dr. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi is of the opinion that some sect based on Rāma must have been established in this period. What I feel is that this cult had no independent existence but was an inseparable part of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavism itself. It came to light through the untiring effort of Svāmi Rāmānanda, the torch-bearer of Vaiṣṇava Bhakti movement. He is considered to be 14th in descent from Svāmi Rāmānuja. *Rāma Pūrva Tāpanīya* and *Uttara Tāpanīya Upaniṣads,* and *Agastya Samhitā* were composed in this tradition.

The picture of religious Sādhanā drawn in the work in question is in agreement with the philosophical and ethical principles of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. The inclusion of such Vaiṣṇava elements as the adoration of Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇa, observance of Vaiṣṇava code of conduct, object of the Vaiṣṇava Sādhanā, the principle of dedication, the traits of the dedicated, the Pañca Samskāras of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, the Nāma Sādhanā, recitation of "aḍakṣara Rāma Mantra, dedication to Ekāyana Mārga, the superiority of Premānanda to Brahmānanda, the importance of spiritual preceptor, pilgrimage to Vaiṣṇava centres, observance of the ceremonies and fasts of Vaiṣṇavas, and putting on the

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26 R. C. Chand, *History of Kashi,* p. 146.

27 *BR,* Pūrva, 103/41, 42.

28 *Ibid.,* Pūrva, 103/39.

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Vaiṣṇava apparels, etc. as laid down in the *Rāmagītā* of the Pūrva Khaṇḍa and Dakṣiṇa Khaṇḍa goes a long way to prove the importance of the *BR* as a great stabilizer of the sectarian values of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. The only difference is that Śrī Vaiṣṇavas regard Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa as eternal God, whereas the author of *BR* holds Sītā and Rāma as supreme, although as just another form of Him.

The reference to the title of *Hanumat Samhitā*, a work connected with the worship of Rāma, is available for the first time in the present work. It is the capital source-book of the erotic worship of Rāma. The number of ślokas as given in the book under study is one lakh. But the one available is very concise. Dr. Rajendra Hazra has referred to its name in his catalogue (Part VII, p. 250). Dr. Bulcke on the basis of its extant copy holds it to have been composed before 1658. This date can be pushed back as far back as the eleventh century in the light of the sources dealing with the evolution of the erotic worship of Rāma as referred to above. The reason is that the existence of the *Agastya Samhitā* or the *Agastya-Sutīkṣṇa-Samvāda* and the similarity with contemporary Vaiṣṇava scriptures in relation to the subject matter.

Historical Context

(A) The Invasion of Yavanas : The commencement of the Yavana (Muslim) invasion on India is traced to be attack of Mohammad Bin Qasim on Sindhu in the early 8th century A.D. But its ceaseless seriality began with Mahamud Ghazanavi's attack on the North-Eastern Frontier about 1000 A.D. The accounts of clash between the Yavanas[29] and the descendants of Raghu given in *BR* offer a glimpse of the tyrannies of the merciless invaders prerpetrated for the love of wealth, religious propaganda and imperial aggrandisement.

It gives the impression that some Muslim colonies had been established in India before the composition of the present book. The division of its territories into 'Mleccha Deśa' and 'Dhanya Deśa',[30] at the hands of its author, testifies to it.

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[29] *BR*, Dakṣiṇa, 51/21-23.

[30] *Ibid.*, L/78.

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(B) The Circulation of Niṣka: The word Niṣka[31] has at one place been used in the context of the description of the prosperity of Kosala in the reign of Rāma as the heir apparent.

The term had a traditional use connoting both, a specific coin and ornament. Its recognition at the hands of the Acharyas like Viṣṇugupta, Bharata, Hemacandra, Śāraṅgdhara, and others, and in such works as *Manusmṛti* and *Rāmāyaṇa,* has also been relevantly referred to. In *Śabdakalpadruma,* the lexicographer, having put in such words as "Chari Mohar", has made it clear that it was, in the real sense of the term, merely a gold coin. The ladies had it fixed in their breast ornament or necklace called 'humel'. Its circulation after the 12th century had become almost evanescent.

(C) The Romantic postures of Rāma-images: Architecture could not escape the influence of the erotic sports of Rāma as expounded in *BR*, *Agastya Samhitā*, and *Hanumat Samhitā*. The poses of the various images of Rāma and Sītā carved on the temples of Khajuraho[32], erected by the Chandela rulers, bear ample testimony to it. Sītā-Rāma as Yugalkishore are united in embrace in one of them. The other shows the four-handed Rāma entwining of her breast. Sītā is shown standing in unison to his left in a Tribhaṅgī. There is a similar image of Rāma-Sītā in the Gwalior Museum also.[33] All of them were carved out between the 9th and 12th centuries.

In the light of these facts, it will not be irrelevant to conclude that *Bhuśuṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa* might have been composed about the 12th century A.D.[34]

Salient Features of the Story

The story of *BR* is mainly based on the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. The only difference is that Vālmīki is pledged to depict the life

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[31] *Ibid.*, 90/1, 5.

[32] *Khajuraho Ki Deva Pratimāyen,* Dr. R. A. Awasthi, p. 111 (plate 36).

[33] *Catalogue of Sculptures in the Archaeological Museum,* Gwalior, p. 25.

[34] Dr. V. Raghavan is of the opinion that this work was composed in the 4th century A.D. (Introduction to *BR*, Varanasi Ed. p. 21).

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of Maryādā Puruṣottama, whereas the author of the present work, lays greater stress on the divine and erotic aspect of the eternal Rāma. This basic difference in viewpoint has resulted in a remarkable change in the style adopted and the subject matter dealt with. The writer of this work has ventured to enter the arena of epic-poetry taking the ideals of the poetry of the Kṛṣṇaites. This has accounted for his failure in the organisation of plot and maintenance of proportion. But so far as the art of creating new themes, making improvements in the depiction of events, deleting or abbreviating the elements found inconsistent with the devotional outlook are concerned, the magnanimity and geniality of the story of Rāma is aptly preserved. The main features of the story are as under—

1. The Supreme Brahman appeared as the son of Daśaratha in the 'Caturvyūha' form with Vāsudeva as Rāma, Saṅkarṣaṇa as Lakṣmaṇa, Pradyumna as Bharata and Aniruddha as Śatrughna. Likewise Mahālakṣmī or Mahā Śakti descended in the form of four daughters of King Janaka of Mithilā, namely—Sītā, Urmilā, Māṇḍavī and Śrutikīrti.
2. Daśaratha sends his sons to Vraja-pradeśa, lying near the other bank of the Sarayū for fear of Rāvaṇa and there they are affectionately looked after by Sukhitā and Maṅgalyā.
3. Rāma sends his picture to Sītā through a bird. They see each other in the flower garden of Janaka and become mutually attracted.
4. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa have an interesting verbal encounter with Paraśurāma before the marriage.
5. Daśaratha leaves for pilgrimage along with Kaikeyī appointing Rāma as the heir-apparent.
6. Rāma adorns Sītā and enjoys Rāsalīlā at Citrakūṭa.
7. Rāma's visit to Śabarī's hermitage annoys Ṛṣis. Their consequent sufferings and the removal thereof through the grace of Śabarī.
8. Rāma's repentance for killing Vāli with selfish ends.

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9. Description of the reign of Rāma's sandals (Pādukārājya varṇana).
10. Rāma's Rāsalīlā in Aśoka Vāṭikā.
11. Aṅgada's visit to Aśoka Vāṭikā after attending the court of Rāvaṇa as messenger.
12. Sītā's spontanuous visit to forest for serving the families of mendicants.
13. Rijeesh Ṛṣi doubts purity of Gopī's love for Rāma, loses his eye-sight and is blessed with it after the Darśana of Rāma in Pramodavana.
14. Rāma participates in the spiritual conference of Munis.
15. *Rāma Gītā* is delivered twice : firstly, to Gopīs and secondly, to Durvāsas, the son of Atri. It is therefore entitled 'Ātreya Gītā'. Both of them deal with the principles and practices of Rāma Bhakti in keeping with the tenets of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas.
16. Dates of some important events of war against Rāvaṇa are given; *e.g.*, Setu Bandha, the killing of Meghanāda and Kumbhakarṇa, duration of Rāma's fight against Rāvaṇa, the killing of Rāvaṇa, Rāma's departure for Ayodhyā, etc.

B. The narration of the following events of Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* has been modified and improved :

1. Causes leading to the incarnation of Rāma, birth-story of Sītā and their childhood sports.
2. The defeat of Kubera and coronation of Rāvaṇa.
3. The preparations of Rāma's enthronement and Mantharā's conspiracy in collusion with Kaikeyī.
4. Rāma's sojourn at Paṅcavaṭī and the killing of the golden deer.
5. The abduction of chhāyā Sītā by Rāvaṇa, Sītā's entry into the Gārhapatya Agni; Her trespassing the Lakṣmaṇa Rekhā.
6. Crossing of the ocean by Hanumān.
7. The process and technique of the construction of Setu.

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8. Consolement of Sītā by Trijaṭā.
9. Meghanāda obtaining the celestial jewel from Śeṣa and conquering Indra.
10. Sītā entering into fire.
11. Rāma's parting with Lakṣmaṇa.

C. Some of the important incidents mentioned by Vālmīki have been dropped, *e.g.*, Rāma's acquisition of Bala and Atibala Vidyā from Viśvāmitra. Meeting of Hanumān with Bharata, the story of Svayamprabhā, duel of Sugrīva with Rāvaṇa, Bharata's conquest of the Gandharva-country, the killing of Śambūka, Vālmīki's vows regarding the immaculateness of Sītā. Sītā entering into the bossom of the mother earth.

Allied Stories

The author has tried to adorn the narrative with the help of interesting allied stories concerning the amorous adventures of Rāma, *viz.*,

1. Blessing the seers of Daṇḍakāraṇya with participation in Rāsa-Līlā as Gopikā's in his next incarnation as Kṛṣṇa.
2. 'Vallarī Mokṣapākhyāna'—Emancipation of the cursed creepers.
3. Sahajopākhyāna—the story of Sahajā, the Āhladinī Śakti of Rāma.
4. Legend of Candravatī, daughter of Surī Śarman of Mithilā.
5. Story of Viśālākṣī, the daughter of Gandhamādana.
6. History of the origin of Sarayū, Mandākinī and Yamunā.
7. 'Kāladamanopākhyāna'—The Story of the suppression of Kāla.
8. Blessing to Agnikumāras.

Influence of Medieval Rāmāyaṇa Literature

The spiritual practices, supported and sustained by the long tradition of Śaiva, Śākta, Buddhist and Vaiṣṇava philosophical systems emerging for the first time in *BR* influenced the entire

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Rāma Bhakti Literature of Northern India. It not only afforded a new interpretation to the concept of Rāma, but also presented the story in a pattern which was to a great extent different from its popular form. As already stated, this process of re-shaping of Rāma's story was most influenced by the *Bhāgavata,* which itself gathered inspiration, directly or indirectly from Vedic and Āgamic systems.

The author of *BR* derived much from the romantic episodes, woven around the charming and magnetic personality of Kṛṣṇa and incorporated them into the story of Rāma. It was a fine approach to popularise the Śrī Vaiṣṇava cult. This was done in keeping with the traditionally sanctioned procedure of popularising new doctrines, by partial acceptance of the doctrines of the preceding systems. Buddha, Ācārya Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja in their turn had followed the same process. The only difference is that the author of *BR* showed inadequate sense of eclecticism. But, for certain reasons he is not to be blamed much. It was a common practice of Pañca-Ratna-Samhitās and Sanskrit poetry. Another and perhaps the stronger factor was the sanctity of the *Bhāgavata* as the principal source of the Bhakti-cult. The author, in this way, widened the field of popularity by presenting the story of Rāma in tune with the spirit of the times. As a result, the ideals, propagated by him, were generally accepted in the Rāmāyaṇa Literature of Sanskrit and the regional languages. The story of Rāma moulded in *BR* became the beacon-light for the later Rāma-epics of India—not only in the realm of worship but also in the field of their literary structure. The following account of its influence upon the Rāmāyaṇas of the medieval period, will make this clear.

Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa

Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa was written with the aim of popularising the philosophy of Vedānta through the story of Rāma. A thorough perusal of the work and its spiritual doctrines leads us to the conclusion that the author had for his reference a number of Rāmāyaṇas before him. He himself says—

रामायणानि बहुशः श्रुतानि बहुभिर्द्विजैः ।[35]

[35] *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa,* 2/4/76.

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Dr. Farquhar[36] and Dr. Prabodh Chandra Bagchi[37] have referred to in this connection, of the existence of three Rāmāyaṇas—*Pampa Rāmāyaṇa, Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* and *BR*. But a comparative study of the story-content and doctrines propounded therein, shows that, of them, *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* stands close to the present one, the *BR*. Moreover, 'Rāmagītā', the most important portion of *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa,* appears with the same title, twice in two different contexts and forms in *BR*. From the ideological viewpoint, there seems to be a marked difference between the two texts in the sense that *BR*. propounds surrender-based Jñāna Yoga in accordance with Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy, whereas in *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* the Advaita Vedānta is paramount. Despite this in both these works, Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa have been accepted as incarnations of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī and Śeṣa. The description of boy-hood sports (Ayodhyā 2/34-35), the ontological analysis of Rāma-Hṛdaya, the prayer to Rāma by Kausalyā, the symbolical reference to Rāma as Kāla and that to Sītā as Kālī (Sundara 1/48) and many other descriptions in *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* seem to be influenced by *BR*.

In the course of her search for the sources of *Rāmacaritamānasa* the references made to *BR* in commentaries led Dr. Charlottee Vaudeville, to the conclusion that the existence of *BR* is acceptable though the book itself ramained untraceable.[38] She expressed in unequivocal terms the possibility of some common source, based on the *Bhāgavata,* influencing the story from Āraṇyakāṇḍa to Uttarakāṇḍa, of *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and *Rāmacaritamānasa* alike.[39] This to her mind would have been none other than the *BR*.

In *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa,* special emphasis has been laid on its recital and singing. Only by bowing before it, one can attain the benefit of God-worship and the study of all scriptures.[40] The

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[36] *Religious Literature of India,* Dr. J.N. Farquhar, p. 250.

[37] *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa,* Nagendra Nath (Introduction by P.C. Bagchi).

[38] *Etude Sur Les Sources Et La composition Du Rāmāyaṇa D Tulsī-.* Charlotte Vaudeville (Hindi Ed.)—Introduction, p. 19.

[39] *Ibid.,* Introduction, p. 20.

[40] *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa,* N. Nath, 1/33/34.

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worshippers of Rāma have been given special importance and honoured with the epithet 'Mahā Bhāgavata'. Taking these into consideration Dr. Prabodh Chandra Bagchi expressed the possibility of the existence of Rāma-cult and a tradition to observe the Rāma Navamī Vrata,[41] long before *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* had come into existence.

So far as the aim of Rāma Bhakti Sādhanā is concerned, the author of *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*[42] has held the 'Prema Lakṣaṇa Bhakti' of *BR* to be the highest achievement of life.[43]

Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa

Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa was written in the post-*Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* period. The important fact which emerges from its study is that the amicable atmosphere, existing between the devotees of Rāma and those of Kṛṣṇa up to the time of *BR* had by then vainshed. Rivalry had now replaced the feeling of indistinction between Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. Consequently, the followers of both the sects were absorbed in propagating the comparative superiority of their Lord.[44] The discussion of Rāma Dās and Viṣṇu Dās amply confirms it. It led to their contest for the establishment of supremacy in respect of amorous sports. The author discovered abundant material in *BR* for the sake of his emotional support. The following context of the Vilāsakāṇḍa and Rajyakāṇḍa convey a deep impact of the present work on *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa :*

(1) The description of the physical beauty of Sītā by Rāma.[45]

(2) The erotic sports of Rāma and Sītā.[46]

(3) Rāma's blessing to the passion-ridden spouses of gods with a love-play in Dvāpara.[47]

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[41] *Ibid.,* (Introduction), p. 7.
[42] *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa,* N. Nath 3/3/45.
[43] *BR,* Pūrva, 207/18-20.
[44] *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa,* Rājyakāṇḍa, 3/1-110.
[45] *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa,* Vilāsakāṇḍa, 2/37-74.
[46] *Ibid.,* 5/50-56.
[47] *Ibid.,* 7/46-49.

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(4) Rāma getting innumerable women in the next incarnation in lieu of his loyalty to one wife.[48]

(5) The condition of the women becoming passionate at the sight of Rāma and the granting of blessings to one hundred of them.[49]

(6) Granting of boon to four daughters of the Brāhmaṇas.[50]

(7) Blessing the sixteen thousand women.[51]

(8) Blessing Rām Dāsi to become his mate as Rādhā in the next incarnation.[52]

The reflection of the ideologies of *BR* regarding the sectarian Rāma Bhakti is found in the Rājyakāṇḍa and Manoharakāṇḍa of this work.

Kṛttivāsa Rāmāyaṇa

There is affinity between a few incidents of *Bangla Rāmāyaṇa* written by Kṛttivāsa and *BR*. An episode in Laṅkākāṇḍa is that when Garuḍa freed Rāma from the Nāgapāśa cast by Meghanāda, Rāma being pleased with him asked him to demand any boon, Garuḍa prayed to him to give a Darśana in the person of Kṛṣṇa playing upon his flute in the Tribhaṅgī pose. Rāma fulfils Garuḍa's wish. Incidentally, Hanumān, too happened to have a glimpse of Rāma in the form of the son of Nanda. He addressed himself to Garuḍa who had thus forced his Lord to change his form and said angrily, "I will take revenge for this at the time of the incarnation of Kṛṣṇa."[53]

The Pūrvakhaṇḍa of BR is the principal source of this story. It is there that Garuḍa, through his surrender to Hanumān, was granted a Darśana of Kṛṣṇa, the lover of Gopikās—

ददर्श रामस्य गुञ्जाकलापं मयूरपिञ्छस्फुरितावतंसम् ।
वंशीकरं गोपदारैः परीतं कृष्णं त्रिभङ्गीललितं खगेन्द्रः ॥[54]

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48 *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa,* Vilāsakāṇḍa, 7/15-7.
49 *Ibid.,* Rājyakāṇḍa, 4/24-47.
50 *Ibid.,* 11/68-73.
51 *Ibid.,* 12/116-118.
52 *Ibid.,* 21/38-40.
53 See *Kṛttivāsa Rāmāyaṇa,* Laṅkākāṇḍa.
54 *BR,* Pūrva, 1/45.

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Besides, Kṛttivāsa has also mentioned Rāvaṇa sending demons to kill Rāma in the course of describing Rāma's boyhood adventues, in the style of the *BR*.

Padāvalī and Dhyāna Mañjarī of Agra Das

Swami Agra Das, the originator of the Rasika cult in Rāma Bhakti, was an early contemporary of Tulasīdāsa. It is said that Emperor Akbar had circulated the 'Rāma-Sītā' type gold and silver coins through the inspiration drawn from him. Though he did not write any Rāmāyaṇa as such, he has described the various incidents of Rāma-Carita and the elements of Rāma Bhakti in his Padāvalī. It appears to be based on *BR*. The naming of the sect as Rasika-Sampradāya, the five-fold emotional relationship, Mānasī Pūjā, the idea of Rāma's love-sports in Pramodavana, and the delineation of Citrakūṭa as the centre of Vihāra-Līlā of Rāma, etc., are some of the ideas derived from *BR*. He has candidly admitted the contribution made by the Āgamas towards the formation and formulation of the Rasika cult.

The influence of Śaiva, Śākta and Vaiṣṇava Āgamas on BR has already been referred to.

Rāmaliṅgāmṛta

The Mādhurya Līlā of Rāma on the pattern of the Rāsa Līlā of Kṛṣṇa has, at several places, been expounded in this work, composed in 1608 by a Brahmin named Advaita, resident of Kashi. Its whole story has been narrated in the form of a dialogue between two Gopikās, one of whom hails from the family of Raghu. It is no gainsaying the fact that the idea of the Gopikā of Ayodhya is the contribution of the author of *BR* and the same has been directly borrowed from it. The under-mentioned elements of the story also convey its impact :

(1) The Vana Krīḍā of Rāma (Sarga 2).

(2) Jānakī Krīḍāhnika. The diurnal sports of Jānakī (sarga 3).

(3) The description of the meals, adornment and union of Rāma and Sītā (Sarga 13).

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(4) The narrative of the emergence of Śrī Raṅganātha and the worship of Raṅgamūrti (Sarga 16).

(5) The Sarayū Māhātmya (Sarga 17).

(6) The oneness of Rāma-Śiva and Rāma-Kṛṣṇa (Sarga 18).[55]

Satyopākhyāna

Tha Rāma Kathā of *Satyopākhyāna* in the form of the dialogue of Vālmīki, Mārkaṇḍeya and Sūta-Śaunaka is the creation of the Rasika cult. Rāma's enjoyment of the spring[56], love-sport in unison with Jānakī[57], Vihāra Līlā in Aśoka-Vana[58], love-play with female companions (Sakhīs) of Sītā on the Śeṣāchala[59], Jala Vihāra in Sarayū[60], and his Gopa Līlā[61], etc., apparently demonstrate the dominance of *BR*.

Bṛhat Kosalakhaṇḍa (Prema Rāmāyaṇa)

The work extending to 15 chapters and 3,072 ślokas has been held to be a part of *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*. The plot of its story seems to have been derived *in toto* from *BR*. The participation of the playmates of Rāma in Rāsa Līlā assuming the form of Sītā, a deep romantic colouring in the erotic sports of Rāma with Gopikās, the daughters of Gandharvas and Kinnaras, and the spouses of gods emanating from the creepers the Sāntanika Vana[62], etc., appear to be the gift of no work other than the present one.

Mahā Rāmāyaṇa

Only five chapters of this epic have been brought out so far. It has the following contents : the foot-marks of Rāma (Chap. 48), the mode of the worship of Rāma with the attitude of a female mate (Chap. 50), the names and duties of thirty-three Śaktis or powers issuing from the person of Sītā (Chap. 51), the derivation of the word Rāma and the exposition of his 99 love-

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[55] C. Bulcke, *Rāma Kathā*, pp. 197.
[56] *Satyopākhyāna*, 50/18-34. [57] *Ibid.*, 77. [58] *Ibid.*, 79/1. [59] *Ibid.*, 81/1.
[60] *Ibid.*, 84/17. [61] *Ibid.*, 17.
[62] C. Bulcke, *Rāma Kathā*, ch. 15

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sports, etc. As per the details given above, the entire extant material seems to have been derived from and inspired by BR. Dr. Bulcke has expressed the possibility of its being identical with BR.[63] But a comparative assessment shows that this speculation is not well grounded.

Oriya Rāmāyaṇa

The erotic tendency of *BR* had a considerable affect on the Rāma Bhakti literature of the eastern region, specially on the Oriya Rāmāyaṇas. Here we find a ceaseless tradition of portraying the sports of Rāma, on the pattern of the romantic adventures of Kṛṣṇa. Descrpition of identity of characters of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa stories by Siddheshwar Parida (Sarala Das) in his *Vilanka Rāmāyaṇa,* the description of the pre-marital love (Pūrvanurāga) of Sītā in *Jag Mohan Rāmāyaṇa* of Balram Das, Rāma blessing the sages of Daṇḍakāraṇya to enjoy the pleasure of Rāsa-Līlā in the form of Gopīs at the time of his incarnation as Kṛṣṇa, the adornment and beautification of the face (Patra-Racanā) of Sītā by Rāma in the forest, and various other similar incidents may be quoted in support.

Similarly, the depiction of Rāsa-Līlā of Rāma on the banks of Sarayū, prior to marriage in *Rāma-Vibhā* (Arjun Das) and Oriya *Narasimha Purāṇa, Śrī-Rāma-vilāsa* or *Raghunātha vilāsa* of Dhanañjaya Bhañj, *Rāmalīlāmṛta* of Upendra Bhañj, *Rāma Vihāra* of Gopinath, *Śrī-Rāma-Vilāsa* of Vipra Bhagiratha, *Ramchandra-vihara* of Maguni Patnayak, *Nritya-Rāmāyaṇa* of Keshava Patnayak and *Rāma-rahasya-padāvalī* (Description of the Rāsa of Rāma with Sītā and other ladies on the banks of Sarayū) of Seva Das are sufficient to prove the existence of the tradition of erotic Rāma Bhakti Literature, right from 1500 A.D. up to the end of the 10th century.

This may also be supported by the following allusions made to the story of Rāma, available in Oriya literature, which have been given particular attention in *BR*—the coming of Paraśurāma after the breaking of the bow and before the celebration of marriage, the arrangement of ladies for all kinds

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63 *Rāma Kathā* (Tra.) p. 179.

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of enjoyment and amenities for the hospitality of Bharata made by Bharadvāja at his Ashram, the adornment (Patra-rachanā) of Sītā by Rāma at Citrakūṭa, conference at Citrakūṭa, and the installation of Bharata-kūpa, and the delineation of the charming beauty of women in erotic contexts.

Rāmacaritamānasa

Like *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, *BR* is also a major source for *Rāmacaritamānasa*. This has been authoritatively shown and accepted by orientalists during the course of their analysis of the sources of its story and the style of narration. Sir George Grierson was the first to draw the attention of researchers towards this fact. Dr. Tessitory, commenting on this suggestion, expressed the possibility that the chapter on Kāka-Bhuśuṇḍi, occurring in the Uttarakāṇḍa of *Rāmacaritamānasa*, might have been based on *BR*. Later on, exploring the sources of *Rāmacaritamānasa*, Charlotte Vaudeville emphasized the authenticity of this proposition. It was a painful surprise to her that the work still lay in obscurity. It was really gartifying to note that the publication of this great work will enable scholars to discover important clues to the religious beliefs and philosophical views of Tulasīdāsa.

In the course of anaylsing the impact of *BR* on *Rāmacaritamānasa* we are inevitably drawn towards the truth that while the former propounds the erotic aspects of Rāma's life, the latter highlights the aspects of Rāma as an exemplary character. The difference in the perspective of the two illustrious authors is so vivid that one hardly dares think of the influence of the *BR* on it. But a deeper study reveals the fact that the author of the *BR* has kept the Nitya-līlā or Mādhurya-līlā of Rāma strictly apart from his Aiśvarya-līlā or Lokalīlā. While the former is purely meant for pleasure and meditation of Aikāntika Bhaktas, the latter aims at general edification, idealisation and universal welfare. Thus, in spite of its erotic character, the traditional ideals of heroism, dignity, and sublimity of Rāma have been well-preserved. Tulasīdāsa, for this reason, felt no hesitation in adopting its story and devotional features. Various points of similarity in the content and style of these two works give a pleasant surprise to researchers, and compel them to speculate that the autohor of *Rāmacaritamānasa* must have had

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a copy of it before him throughout the period of its composition.

The influence of *BR* may be discerned also in other literary works of Tulasīdāsa, particularly in *Gītāvalī* and *Kavitāvalī*. Due to the limitation of time, a comparative study of them will at the moment not be feasible. We therefore remain contented only with a few illsutrations given in support of the thematic and stylistic parallelism between them.

The Auspicious Moment of the Birth of Rāma

चैत्रस्य शुक्लपक्षे तु नवम्यां श्रीपुनर्वसौ ।
अभिजिन्नामयोगेऽसौ कौसल्यानन्दनोऽभवत् ।।

–भुशुण्डि रामायण, पूर्व० 10/2

नौमी तिथि मधुमास पुनीता ।
सुक्ल पच्छ अभिजित हरिप्रीता ।।

–रामचरितमानस, बाल० 161/1

There is no mention of 'Abhijit Yoga' in the above context in the Vālmīki and *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇas*.

Derogation of Paraśurāma

Rāmacaritamānasa, like the *BR*, mentions the coming of Paraśurāma after the breaking of the bow and before the marriage of Sītā with Rāma. As against this both Vālmīki and the author of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* mention the incident to have occurred in the way after the departure of Daśaratha from Mithilā. Thereafter an ordinary exchange of words, Rāma accepting the challenge of angry Paraśurāma puts the string on the bow. Paraśurāma's pride is thus shattered and after bowing before the emobdiment of Viṣṇu leaves for penance. The name of Lakṣmaṇa nowhere occurs in this context, nothing to say of his intervention. The interesting dialogue between Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa on one side and Paraśurāma on the other is the ingenuity of the present writer. Tulasīdāsa felt fascinated by it and quoted the above incident—

रामा किंचित्स्पृष्टं न वा स्पृष्टं धनुस्तत् पुरवैरिणः ।
तद्वै चिरेण जीर्णत्वादभज्यत करोमि किम् ।।

–भुशुण्डि रामायण, पूर्व० 78/12

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छुअतहिं टूट पिनाक पुराना ।
मैं केहि हेतु करौं अभिमाना ।।

–रामचरितमानस, बाल० 283/8

लक्ष्मण:–धनुरेकगुणं धत्ते बलमस्माकमूर्जितम् ।
उपवीतं नवगुणं विशिष्टं भवतां बलम् ।।

–भुशुण्डि रामायण, पूर्व० 78/83

देव एक गुन धनुष हमारे ।
नवगुन परम पुनीत तुम्हारे ।।

–रामचरितमानस, बाल० 282/7

Puṣpavātikā Incident

The Puṣpavāṭikā incident has not been mentioned either in Vālmīki or *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. It has been incorporated in *Rāmacaritamānasa* probably through the inspiration drawn by its author from the *BR*—

तत्रागमच्च मिथिलेन्द्रकुमारिका सा
सीता स्वयं नमितुमालयमम्बिकाया: ।
तां वीक्ष्य भूय उदितस्मरबाणताप-
संभ्रान्त-चित्त इव तत्क्षणमास राम:।।

–भुशुण्डि रामायण, पूर्व० 75/4

तेहि अवसर सीता तहं आई ।
गिरिजा पूजन जननि पठाई ।।
जासु बिलोकि अलौकिक सोभा ।
सहज पुनीत मोर मन छोभा ।।

–रामचरितमानस, बाल० 228/2, 230/3

The Saving of Kaikeyī's Character

In Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, the responsibility of the exile of Rāma has been placed on the cruel nature of Kaikeyī. But *BR* gives the story of changing the mind of Mantharā by Sarasvatī through the connivance of gods and thereby inducing Kaikeyī to

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ask for the banishment of Rāma. All the later Rāmāyaṇas, specially *Adhyātma* and *Ānanda*, have followed the suit. Tulasīdāsa on his part accepted the idea and presented it in his *magnum opus,* with a psychologial setting—

मन्थरा नाम कैकेय्या दासी मन्दतया धिया ।
तस्याः कण्ठे सन्निविश्य ब्राह्मी प्रतिविधास्यति ।।

—भुशुण्डि रामायण, दक्षिण० 6/10

नाम मंथरा मंदमति दासी केकइ केरि।
अजस पेटारी ताहि करि गई गिरा मति फेरि ।।

—रामचरितमानस, अयोध्या० 12

The Adorning of Sītā by Rāma in Citrakūṭa

Though apparently unconcerned with the Rasika cult of the Rāma-Bhakti movement, Tulasīdāsa appeas to have a soft corner for its tenets. This fact is established by his picturesque descriptions of the amorous scenes and sports of Rāma, depicted specially in *Rāmacaritamānasa*, *Gītāvalī* and *Kavitāvalī*. One such scene from *BR* has found a place in *Rāmacaritamānasa*, when Rāma adorns Sītā during his sojourn at Citrakūṭa and indulges in amorous overtures with her.

चिरं विहृत्य वैदेह्या भगवान् रतिवर्द्धनः ।
अशोभत शिलापृष्ठे पौलोम्येव पुरंदरः ।।

अथ शृङ्गारयामास प्रियां विस्रस्तभूषणाम् ।
चम्पकैर्गुम्फयामास वेणीमलकशालिनीम् ।।

अलकेषु बबन्धास्याः केशरस्य सुमान्यलं ।
चक्रे कमलपत्रश्च कञ्चुकी कुच-कुम्भयोः ।।

सनालैः पङ्कजैश्चक्रे बाह्यो केयूरयुग्मकम् ।
विचित्रपुष्पस्तबकैर्भूषाः कल्पितवान् पृथक् ।।

पञ्चवर्ण-प्रसूनाद्यां स्रजं कमलशालिनीम् ।
वक्षसि न्यस्तवान् रामो रमण्याः स वशंवदः ।।

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हरितालरसैर्मिश्रां सिन्दूराक्तां मनःशिलां ।
संघृष्य रमणो गुण्यां भाले तिलकमातनोत् ।।

विभूष्य स्वामिनीमेष स्वयं चाभूषितस्तया ।
रेजाते तावुभौ तत्र शोभमानौ परस्परम् ।।

इत्थं चिरं कन्दरायां चित्रकूटमहीभृतः ।
क्रीडित्वा प्रेयसीयुक्तां निर्जगाम ततः शनैः ।।

–भुशुण्डि रामायण, दक्षिण 17/41-48

There is only a passing reference to this incident in *Rāmacaritamānasa*—

एक बार चुनि कुसुमि सुहाए । निज कर भूषन राम बनाए ।
सीतहि पहिराए अति सादर । बैठे फटिक सिला पर सुंदर ।।

–रामचरितमानस, अरण्य० 2, 3

But in *Gītāvalī*, the author has given a detailed pen pictue of this hidden trait of Rāma's character—

चित्रकूट अतिविचित्र, सुन्दर वन महि पवित्र,
पखनि पय सरित सकल मल निकंदिनी ।।

विरचितं तहं पर्नसाल अति विचित्र लखनलाल,
निवसत जहं नित कृपाल राम जानकीं ।।

निजकर राजीवनयन पल्लवदल रचित सयन,
प्यास परसपर पीयूष प्रेम पान की ।।

सिय अंग लिखैं धातुराग सुमननि भूषन विभाग,
तिलक करनि कहांका कृपानिधान की ।।

माधुरी विलास हास गावत जस तुलसिदास,
बसति हृदय जोरी प्रिय परम प्रान की ।।

–गीतावली, अयोध्या०

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Rāma's Departure from the Scene

The last act of Rāma's worldly existence, according to *BR* was his announcement to the inhabitants of Ayodhyā of the decision to depart for Pramodavana, the seat of his eternal blissful sports. Tulasīdāsa, catching this idea, has depicted Rāma's entry into a grove and made never to return thereafter—

अथ लोकजनैः साकं यातुकामो प्रमुद्वनम् ।
भगवान् घोषयामास दुन्दुभिं कोसलापुरे ।।
गच्छन्तु सर्वे प्रमोद-विपिने धाम मामकम् ।
तत्र नित्यं मया सार्द्धं मोदन्तां नित्यलीलया ।।

–भुशुण्डि रामायण, उत्तर० 52/1,4

पुनि कृपाल पुर बाहेर गये ।
गजरथ तुरग मंगावत भये ।।
हरन सकल श्रम प्रभु श्रम पाई ।
गए जहां सीतल अंवराई ।।

–रामचरितमानस, उत्तर० 50/3,5

The foregoing analysis makes it evident that, being the oldest epic of the medieval times of the Rāmaite sect, *BR* continued to be the fountain source of inspiration for the later Rāma Bhakti literature. In *Adhyātma* and *Rāmacaritamānasa* only the story element of *BR* could be acceptable owing to ideological differences. But in the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa, Rāma Liṅgāmṛta, Rāma Rasāyana, Amara Rāmāyaṇa* and in several others the doctrinal and ritualistic aspects were also incorporated. The Rasika Rāma Bhakti had the upper hand in the realm of devotional practices in the post-Tulasī-period. The erotic school of Rīti-Kāvya fanned this movement. Consequently, the depiction of Rāma's amorous sports became the guiding principle for the later medieval Rāmāyaṇa-writers.

This tendency is prominent in the Oriya Rāmāyaṇas as in their Hindi counterparts. To my mind this can be ascribed to the

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predominance of Tāntric and esoteric elements inherent in the erotic Rāma Bhakti Sādhanā, for which there had been a fertile ground in that part of the country, which was an active centre of Tāntric practices of Śāktas and Buddhist Siddhas. Needless to say that the credit for popularising this time-honoured practice through the medium of Rāma-story goes to the author of the *BR*.

In view of the aforesaid unique features of the work it would not be an exaggeration to say that, besides being an illustrious epic of the Rāmaite sect, it can also be designated as a mine of information for pre-medieval cults.

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RĀMACARITAMĀNASA AND THE PERFORMING TRADITION OF RĀMĀYAṆA

By **INDUJA AWASTHI**

Rāmacaritamānasa of Tulasīdāsa written four hundred years ago occupies a unique place in poetic works on Rāma saga along with Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* and Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* by Kamba. Though it follows the Vaiṣṇava and Purāṇic tradition of handling the Rāma-theme portraying Rāma as an incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu, it is an exceedingly sensitive and creative poem. It has greatly influenced the social conduct, the values and ideals of the people of north India and for all these centureis, has been the most respected work.

By Tulasī's time, the Rāma-story had emerged as a popular and important element in literature and in oral tradition. Both the traditions had overlapped and interfused over the years making the epic theme richer. *Rāmacaritamānasa* and other works of Tulasīdāsa are on the one hand the pride of Hindi literatue and on the other are on the lips of even the illiterate people. It was because of these echoes of oral tradition that *Rāmacaritamānasa* easily became part of the performing tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Mention of the dramatic representation of Rāma-theme based on the epic occurs for the first time in the *Harivaṁśa* which is the Khilaparva of the *Mahābhārata* and is believed to belong to the 4th century A.D.

> "Daitya King Vijaya, of Vajrapura, had a daughter called Prabhāvatī. She heard of the handsome Pradyumna and longed to see him. With the help of Prabhāvatī, the Yādava warriors got permission from the Daitya King and entered Vajrapura in the guise of actors. Pradyumna was the chief of this group while Sāmba came in the guise of a jester. Then the actor called Varadatta, danced and gratified the people of Vajrapura. They had a performance based on the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* depicting how Lord Viṣṇu incarnated

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Himself to kill the Rākṣasa King. They enacted the role of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, Śatrughna, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, Śāntā, etc., very realistically."

This extract from the *Harivaṁśa* is important as it indicates that the performance was not a Rāma-play in the tradition of classical Sanskrit drama, but based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki, the mention of dance in the first line indicates that movements were stylised which is characteristic of the traditional Indian theatre.

After this for several centuries we do not have any reference of this type of epic-based performance in the history of Sanskrit drama. The *Mahānāṭaka* or *Hanumannāṭaka* believed to have been written sometime between the 10th or 12th century is of special interest in determining the continuity of the traditional Rāmāyaṇa theatre. Historians of Sanskrit literature like Winternitz, Keith and S.K. De have accepted *Mahānāṭaka* as a dramatic composition in the popular tradition. Śāradātanaya in his *Bhāvaprakāśana* (P. 241 u. 4-5) kept *Mahānāṭaka* in a special category of Samagra play and Samagra play has been defined thus :

सर्ववृत्तिविनिष्पन्नं सर्वलक्षणसंयुतम् ।
समग्रं तत्प्रतिनिधिः महानाटकमुच्यते ।।

i.e., Samagra play is that which is embellished with music and dance. *Mahānāṭaka* violates many other conventions of Sanskrit drama like the use of Prākrit or presence of the jester and its textual material is a compendium of dramatic verses taken from the Rāmāyaṇas—Vālmīki and *Adhyātma,* from plays ranging from *Uttararāmacarita* to *Anargharāghava* and Kāvyas *Raghuvaṁśa, Jānakīharaṇa* and *Bhatti Kāvya.* In Hindi the most glaring examples of the plays of this nature which seem to represent and belong to a living popular theatre tradition are *Hanumannāṭaka* or the *Rāmāyaṇa Mahānāṭaka.* They follow the pattern of the Sanskrit *Mahānāṭaka* and are a kind of compilation of dramatic verses on Rāma-theme from different sources and seem to be a generic name suggesting a whole class of plays written on this pattern on the Rāmāyaṇa-theme. According to a legend recorded in *Gautama Candrikā* of Kṛṣṇa Dutt Misra, believed to be written just after Tulasīdāsa, the idea

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of starting the *Rāmāyaṇa* dramatic performance came in Tulasī's mind while reading the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. The legend says that "Tulasī thought of what had been said by Bharata and with his minds' eye witnessed the performance of *Hanumad-Abhinaya.*" By this line it is clear that before Tulasī's time 'Hanumad-Abhinaya' or *Hanumannāṭaka* had come to mean a dramatic performance enacting the Rāma-story. On the basis of this we can accept the forerunner of the traditional Indian Rāma theatre.

No later references are available in Sanskrit of this type of play but it seems the tradition of performing *Rāmāyaṇa* as a theatrical spectacle continued and fully manifested during the medieval centuries especially with the emergence and the spread of Rāma cult.

The tradditional *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre is based primarily on the recitation of the epic, which had a rich tradition of several centuries. In the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* itself we have reference of Kuśa and Lava reciting the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the court of Rāma, it is believed that the word Kuśīlava reciter-actor is an outcome of this. At some point in history, the tradition of recitation got connected with the folk dramatic presentation of the epic.

It was around 14th century that the Rāma-story had become very popular in its theatrical presentation in various forms of traditional theatre in other language regions such as Ankia Nāṭ of Assam, Kathakali of Kerala, Yakshagāna of Mysore, and Daśāvatāra in Maharashtra.

These forms though evolved independently utilising elements from indigenous theatre, seem to have artistic links with the Rāmalīlā—Traditional Rāma theatre of the Hindi region follow similar structural pattern. In this context it is noteworthy that as in Hindi region the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre is based on *Rāmacaritamānasa*, so also in many other regions the language Rāmāyaṇas became the base of the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre and supplied episodes and textual material not only to the human theatre but to the various forms of puppet theatre. We can see that *Rāmacaritamānasa* and Tulasīdāsa are greatly respected in some regions. In some of the forms such as *Rāma Kathā Dodatta* of Karnatak verses from *Rāmacaritamansas* are used and in the introductory part of the play. Tulasīdāsa is referred to very respectfuly as the greatest writer of Rāma-story. In Orissa

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Rāmacaritamānasa has been read and recited for centuries, and has inspired and influenced the Oriya *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre also called Rāmalīlā. The literary tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* played a role in building up popular theatre tradition of the Rāma sāga and *Rāmacaritamānasa* has a unique place in this respect.

In the Hindi region, it is the 'Sandesh Rāsak' of poet Abdur Rahman written in the 13th century where one comes across a mention of plays based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* for the first time. Speaking of Multan, the traveller says, stories of Sudavachchha, Nala and the *Mahābhārata* are recited here and there. Brāhmins, who have renounced the world, bless the people and in some places 'Kayvarihi' are enacting the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Next, we come across 'Asa di var' of Guru Nanak (1469-1538) in which a reference has been made to a dance-drama pertaining to Rāma-theme. Referring to some popular dramatic performances, Nanak says that the people of Virendravana are singing and dancing as Kṛṣṇa and Gopis as well as Sītā and Rāma for the sake of earning a living.

It is a well-known fact that Guru Nanak had visited Vrindāvana and witnessed Kṛṣṇalīlā, but he mentions Rāma along with the performances pertaining to Kṛṣṇa, which shows that both of them had become themes of dramatic performances by that time.

These quotations have great significance as they indicate that traditional dramatic performances pertaining to Rāma and Kṛṣṇa themes were in vogue in the Hindi speaking region. Tulasī himself was familiar with Rāmalīlā as is amply shown by the statement of Kākabhuśuṇḍi in the Uttarakāṇḍa of *Rāmacaritamānasa*.

People generally believe that Tulasīdāsa was the originator of that form of Rāmalīlā which is performed nowadays in the Hindi-speaking region. Dr. Shyam Sunder Das has stated in the preface of *Mānas* published by the Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha that "although the Rāsalīlā of Kṛṣṇachandra was in vogue earlier, yet it is equally well-known that Rāmalīlā accompanied with singing of bhajans, was also prevalent; but the Rāmalīlā as witnessed these days, has its origin in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulasī."

While discussing the religio-dramatic tradition of the medieval times, Kunwar Chandra Prakash Singh writes :

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"Although the tradition of Rāmalīlā is very old yet it has undergone several changes due to the circumstances and also at the hands of eminent persons, as to its form and technique." That form of Rāmalīlā which is prevalent in the Hindi-speaking regions, owes its origin to Goswami Tulasīdāsa. In his book entitled 'Gosain Tulasīdās', Dr. Vishwa Nath Mishra has stated that "there is no doubt that the Rāma-story and the tradition of dramatic performances based on the classical literary plays, is very old. Tulasī took it upon himself to propagate Rāmalīlā. He planned it in such a way that it became popular throughout the Hindi-speaking region. In this way Tulasīdāsa is the originator and propagator of the modern form of Rāmalīlā."

The study of the structure of the *Mānas* reveals a sound dramatic design. Each episode has been conceived as a single dramatic unit. Following the pattern of the traditional theatre it has narrative and dramatic portions, properly balanced and fulfilling dramatic requirement. The narrative portions introduce the story, describe the locale and characters involved in that particular episode. The dialogue portions can easily be assigned to the characters. Episodes like Puṣpavāṭikā, Dhanuryajña, Kaikeyī-Mantharā dialogue, departure for the forest, Śūrpaṇakhā event, abduction of Sītā and Aśokavāṭikā event, etc. are so dramatic that even the recitation give one a theatrical experience. The dramatic portions have been conceived and developed in the Paurāṇic style of question and answer or Samvāda Paramparā, and Tulasīdāsa seems to have fully utilised this tradition to build up and sustain his dramatic design. It is because of such a dramatic structure that episodes from the *Mānas* are bodily lifted and are presented on the Rāmalīlā stage.

An important characteristic of the Rāmalīlā is that it is not confined to a particular region but is presented in many regions. It is the major dramatic form in the hindi-speaking States, Uttara Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and Punjab and Bihar also. Rāmalīlā troupes from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are also invited to give performances in different cities of Gujarat and Maharashtra. It can, therefore, be stated that the region of Rāmalīlā extends to Kumaon and Nepal in the north, Punjab in the west, Orissa in the east and Maharashtra in the south.

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It is natural that a dramatic form extending over such a large part of country, must have some local variations; but the remarkable fact is that all these variations betray the inherent oneness. One may witness the performance of the Rāmalīlā troupe in Janakpurdham (a town on the border of Nepal and Bihar) or the Rāmalīlā being enacted at the Assi Ghat of Varanasi or the one in Ramnagar, or the one in Satna in Madhya Pradesh, or the Rāmalīlā being sung in Patunda village of Rajasthan, the total effect and dramatic experience will be the same.

All these Rāmalīlās have certain common characteristics, *viz.*, serialised representation, complete identification and devotional attitude of the audience, importance given to certain religious rituals, the presentation technique, arrangement of characters and costumes and make-up.

There are many styles of presenting Rāmalīlā. One of the old styles of Rāmalīlā is pantomimic full of tableaux and processions. In the Rāmalīlā of Citrakūṭa (Varanasi) or Bisau (Rajasthan) while the *Mānas* is being recited, the actors enact in pantomime, there may be some brief dialogues sometimes. The 'Swarūpas' and other characters are taken out in decorated carriages in the form of a procession accompanied with the *'Rāmayaṇīs'* (a group of reciters of Mānas) in separate carriages and certain situations from the *Mānas* are colourfully represented on the floats.

The second style of Rāmalīlā is dialogue-based. Different situations of the Rāma-story are rendered into suitable dialogue form and then a lengthy text is prepared of the dramatised versions of all such situations. Dialogues from literary sources other than *Mānas*, songs and folk songs are used for the preparation of the text. Perhaps for the first time, representation of Rāmalīlā in such detail and on such a panoramic scale was carried out in the Rāmalīlā of Ramnagar. This style of Rāmalīlā is the most widespread and is presented in most places in the Eastern and Western U.P., Madhya Pradesh and Bihar.

Another traditional style of Rāmalīlā is operatic, it goes back not more than a hundred years. In this style the recitation from the *Mānas* is set to classical *rāgas* and the dialogues are also delivered in song. They include bhajan, dādrā, ṭhumrī,

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gazal, etc. Operatic Rāmalīlā is performed in the Kumaon region, in Haryana at certain places and in the Patunda village of Rajasthan.

The style of Rāmalīlā may differ but some of the main situations are presented in the same way in all styles for example, Rāmajanma (Rāma's birth) and his coronation is presented everywhere in tableau form. Slaying of Rāvaṇa is presented in the same manner, irrespective of the style of Rāmalīlā. Large paper effigies of Rāvaṇa and Kumbhakarṇa are placed in an open field. 'Rāma' and 'Lakṣmaṇa' arrive in some sort of carriage, enact a few battle movements and then set the effigies on fire by releasing a burning arrow. The effigies burst into flames and the exploding crakers appear to signalize the triumph of truth over untruth. This Rāmalīlā is enacted at most places on the day of Dussehra. Similarly, processions are taken out on the day of Rāma's marriage and on the day of Bharat-Milāp, at all the places. These processions, comprising gorgeously decorated tableaux and accompanied with fan-fare, go round the entire city. The people hail them heartily and they are offered 'āratī' The importance of the institution of tableaux and procession in all styles of Rāmalīlā, together with the essential recitation of the *Mānas*, conclusively indicates that this pantomimic form of Rāmalīlā is its earliest form.

The Rāmalīlā of every style is presented as a serial play. The main episodes are presented on different drama days, the period can range from ten to 31 days according to local customs and also resources of the Rāmalīlā Committee, but it always has to be a cycle play, meaning that in the traditional Rāmalīlā the whole story cannot be performed in one day.

The traditional Rāmalīlā has developed its dramatic form on the basis of a recitation of *Rāmacaritamānasa*. It is the recitation which determines the structure of the performance. The recitation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has a religious significance. There is a group of singers called *Rāmāyaṇī* attached to the play and they recite the entire text of the epic poem sequence by sequence stopping at various points to give scope to the actors to present the dialogues which are quite often a paraphrase of the verses of the *Rāmacaritamānasa*. Actually, the dramatic performance has been conceived as a commentary on the Hindi Rāmāyaṇa. This has been stated clearly in the Ramnagar Rāmalīlā—"Rāmalīlā is the premier commentary on

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the *Rāmacaritamānasa*... all the compositions of the *Mānas* become clear in the Rāmalīlā..." Thus recitation of the epic is an essential part of all styles of the Rāmalīlās—now in some places some portions are skipped over or shortened. Even the modern presentation of the drama-story is based on the recitation.

The element of recitation is so important in the Rāmalīlā that for several days prior to the dramatic presentation, the portion of *Rāmacaritamānasa* up to the birth of Rāma is recited, similarly the portion after the coronation of Rāma is also recited after the Rāmalīlā performance is over. This tradition of reciting these portions has both ritualistic and dramatic significance because these are not directly related to the Rāma-story.

The recitation and the relevant dramatic representation, along with dialogues, go side by side. The actors stand motionless on the stage as long as the relevant recitation comes to an end. The modern audience, used to the concept of dramatic illusion in the Western traditon, may perhaps feel that the recitation of the text, while freezing the emotional scenes and the dialogues in the middle, mars the dramatic effect. But in the Indian popular dramatic tradition, more importance has been given to the creation of suitable atmosphere and less to dramatic effects and counter-effects. Creation of suitable atmosphere is all the more important in the case or religious dramas. The audience of Rāmalīlā never feel aware of any shortcoming in the performance on this account. They are familiar with the story, all the dialogues and the narration, completely. For this reason, the recitation between the dialogues does not dampen or lessen their enjoyment. This sort of punctuation, in fact, provides them a few more rapturous moments of the particular mood created by the situation. Even otherwise, the object of Rāmalīlā to satisfy the devotional urge of the audience is fulfilled by prolonging their ecstasy.

The Rāmāyaṇa stage has evolved from and structures, and dimension of the staging and retains many practices and conventions of the medieval staging. The two basic values of the medieval theatre namely multiplicity of locale and simultaneity of action determine the nature of Rāmāyaṇa stage and its staging conditions in different regions and its variety of styles.

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An interesting feature is to be seen in the Rāmalīlās of Vārāṇasī where various episodes are enacted in different locales suited to the setting of that particular piece. It is believed that this practice was started by Tulasīdāsa who used this device to involve people from all parts of the city. The Rāmnagar Maharaja went a step ahead and built palaces, gardens and ponds in Rāmnagar according to the description of *Rāmacaritamānasa*. Thus the whole town there is used a theatre with permanently built locales such as Daśaratha's palace, Janaka's palace and his garden, Citrakūṭa; Pañcavaṭī, Rāvaṇa's palace and Aśoka garden where Sītā was kept in captivity.

In Mathurā they have another interesting stage convention. In the day-time the Rāmalīlā is presented as an open air pantomimic show in a large field and in the night the same episodes are performed on a platform stage. The multiple setting convention, however, is maintained even in the professional Rāmalīlās or the modern experiments in dance drama style due to the epic character of the presentation.

Rāmalīlā evokes a unique personal involvement in every town and village where it is performed. Whether it is due to the popularity of the Rāma saga or the special staging condition the audience involvement is much more than accorded in any other theatre and this feature gives it a strong and unprecedented dimension. On the day Rāma leaves for the forest with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa the audience follows them with sobbing, on the day of marriage the procession is received by all the rich householders at their gate and gifts are offered to the bridegroom amidst great festivity; on the day of Rāma's return to Ayodhyā and meeting with Bharata the houses and streets are decorated and there is general atmosphere of gaiety.

The persons taking part in the dramatic performance are all amateur artists, sometimes the offerings received at the closing 'āratī' are wholly or partly distributed among them. Most of them take pride and act their roles with singular dedication. In numerous Rāmalīlās, some of the roles are reserved for the families, generation after generation. It does happen that people who go abroad for a living or otherwise, return to their villages

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at the time of Rāmalīlā for the sake of acting their roles, just as one returns to a family celebration.

There are a few rules about the characters which are observed in every Rāmalīlā, for example, all the roles are assigned to men only—females are completely prohibited from acting in the Rāmalīlā. Boys from 12 to 16 years are selected from Brāhmin families for the roles of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, Śatrughna and Sītā. Their looks and speech, etc. is attractive so that they appear as 'Swarūp' i.e., god-like. They have to behave in dignified manner during the period of Rāmalīlā and are shown usual deference by the audience and the people managing the show.

The traditional Rāmalīlā is performed and presented on an amateur, i.e., non-professional basis. There is usually a Rāmalīlā committee and the members thereof are elected every year from amongst those who take interest in Rāmalīlā. This Committee takes subscriptions from the people and spends the money so collected on the performance. Generally, there is only the Rāmalīlā Committee in a city which sponsors the festival, but in bigger cities there can be more than one Rāmalīlā Committee and each one of them has its own plan for the festival. These Committees take great pride in organising the festival and members work with utmost dedication. The organisation of these Committees and the high degree of co-operation inspired by them, is indeed an indication of the people's devotion towards Rāmalīlā which is observed year after on a big scale without any financial help from the State.

This theatrical form based on recitation was primarily evolved to propogate Rāmabhakti. The word Līlā itself meaning the 'actions of incarnation' has theological significance. Rāmalīlā has, therefore, been conceived as a religious ritual and to act in it or even to witness the performance is considered an expression of devotion to Rāma.

Before the Rāmalīlā is started, on an auspicious day the crowns of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, Śatrughna and Sītā are worshipped. These characters are called 'Swarūps', images of Gods, and are supposed to be embellished with divine qualities

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after putting on these crowns. Everyday at the beginning and end of the performance, the Swarūps are worshipped and 'āratī' is performed with great pomp and show. On the last day, the coronation is celebrated with song and dance. In Ayodhyā, Rāma's birth-place, the dance festivities go on for the whole night. In Ramnagar, the whole town flocks for the 'Darshan' of the 'Panchāyatan Jhāṅkī'—the grand Tableau of the five epic characters in the coronation scene.

The Rāmalīlā is also a theatre of conventions. These conventions and practices can be recognised as the classical Sanskrit and medieval theatre traditions. The multiplicity and simultaneous nature of the action, the alternation of prose and verse dialogues, use of a group of singers for singing the entire text are some of the conventions that truly represent the spirit of the Indian Theatre.

Apart from the traditional Rāmalīlā, *Rāmacaritamānasa* also greatly contributed to the evolution of Stage Rāma plays written during 19th century in the wake of the realistic modern Indian theatre. The thematic structure of these plays is broadly based on *Rāmacaritamānasa* and these draw their textual material primarily from the *Rāmacaritamānasas*. It is significant that the very first literary play in Hindi is 'Ānand Raghunandan'; it covers main episodes of *Rāmāyaṇa* as presented in the *Rāmacaritamānasa* and the first play presented on the Hindi stage is *Jānakī Maṅgal*—'Sītā's marriage' in which many of the dialogues are paraphrases of chaupayees from the *Mānas*. These and the other Rāma plays are presented on proscenium theatre with painted curtains and in their entire presentation style follow the professional Parsi theate of the mid-19th century. These plays encouraged professional Rāma theatre and led to the emergence of professional companies called Rāmalīlā Maṇḍalīs who perform Rāmalīlā as a play on the curtain-stage. A substantial body of dramatic writing in Hindi belongs to these Rāma-plays.

During the last thirty years or so new theatrical performances based on *Rāmāyaṇa* have been created in various forms such as shadow play, ballets, dance-dramas and marionettes. In all these new creations, bulk of textual material has again been drawn from the *Rāmacaritamānasa*; also in

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presentation style, costumes, music, stage conventions are related to the traditional Rāmalīlā. In its fourth century celebration the *Rāmacaritamānasa* was also used for the sole dance styles such as Kathak, Bharatanāṭyam and Odissi very successfully and with great effect.

Studying the vast and multi-dimensional aspects of the Rāmalīlā one realises that a very large part of our cultural heritage is contained in this theatre form. It is through this performing tradition of the *Rāmacaritamānasa* that the great ideals and values of the epic have become part of the social and ethical life of the Indian people and integrated with the traditional culture. We know that the Rāma-story is part of the traditional theatre of the whole country but embellished with the deep devotion, great poetic quality and the dramatic capacity of the *Rāmacaritamānasa*, the Rāmalīlā has become one of the most popular among all the traditional theatre forms of India.

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RĀMĀVATĀRA (RĀMĀYAṆA) By GURU GOBIND SINGH

By **BALJIT TULSI**

A nation survives which has the strength of character, which has sense of high-souled duty, which has power of self and collective discipline, which has high mental and moral conduct and above all which has resouces of inspiring literature.

India is fortunate to have *Rāmāyaṇa* as its spring of inspirational literature. Literature is the main and most fundamental medium which has the force to bring about change in the pattern of thinking, which has the strength to brighten up the heights of the high ideals, which has the power to move the highly hard and ever unmoved individuals, which has the capacity of performing miracles of transforming human, mental and moral self.

The first great epic written in the Indian Literature was composed by Maharshi Vālmīki. It has its forceful effect over the life of common or uncommon man, high or low, rich or poor, man or woman, husband or wife, mother or brother. It has a message for all, ideal for all and inspiration for all.

Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* is written in Sanskrit. Three hundred and fifty years ago, it was again written by Goswami Tulasīdāsa in the spoken language Hindi (Brij). The Bhakti movement was greatly in force during those days. Therefore, he wrote *Rāmacaritamānasa* in a devotional attitude to bring about Bhakti Bhāva in the social atmosphere.

Three hundred years ago, a great heroic drama was enacted on the soil of the five rivers against communal tyranny, narrow-mindedness, treachery and perfidy of the fanatical rulers of those times and their mypioc policies. It was a crusade for truth, justice, human freedom and equality. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth master of the Sikhs, was the hero of the play. Communal tyranny had rendered the nation weak, timid and insecure. Guru Gobind Singh revived the oriental spirit of the Indians, infused in them the spirit of nationalism, filled in them the spirit of

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courage and heroism, made them fearless and dauntless, stirred in them the spirit of truth and self-respect. He changed the outlook of the common man. He transformed them into heroes of the great epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, made them realise their own intrinsic and essential worth. He was a great litterateur. He was an eminent scholar. He wrote the great epic in the language of the common man and effected a thorough change in the mental, moral and spiritual life of the people.

Aim of writing

In the most explicit words he made a declaration "call me Gobind Singh only if I am able to produce great warriors, distinguished soldiers and brave heroes." He applied all his force, all his strength, all his knowledge, all his ability, all his competence and all his talents of writing to make it a living reality.

Place of writing

In the words of the great writer :

"Netar tung ke charan tal
Sakidruv tīr tarang.
Sri bhagwat pūran kio
Raghubar kathā Parsang. (861)

I composed the whole narrative of Rāma, the incarnate, at the bank of river Sutlej, flowing at the foot of mount Naina Devi.

Date and year of writing

Samat satraū sehas pachāvan
Hār vadi pratham sukhdāvan
Tav prasād kar granth sudhārā
Bhūl pari le leho sudhārā (860)

During the samvat year 1755 on the first of the month of Aharh, I completed the narrative by the Grace of the Almighty. Any error therein may kindly be set right because :

Teh te kahī thorī aī bīn kathā,
Bal tave upjī sudh math jathā.
Jeh bhūl bhahī ham te lehīo,
Sukboteh achhar bana kahīo. (6)

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It is a concise, selected, spontaneous, upsurge of my pure intellect, in a variety of verse. Any error therein may be attributed to me because I have tried to decorate it in various metres.

Rāmāvatāra and Its Chhandas (Metres)

Rāmāvatāra was written in 864 cantos and 71 types of metres. The metres used are rare, marvellous and admirable. All the Rasas used in the poetic diction have been effectively and remarkably used at proper places. The metre used to depict the gallop of the horses has been wonderfully used. It sounds as if the metre—the rhyme and the rhythm—of the verse also gallops along with the horses. The horses on which the princes proceed from Ayodhyā for marriage are restless and quick in speed, and this is depicted beautifully :

Nāgrā ke nain haīn, ke chatrī ke bein hain,
Baghola mano gain, kaise teise bachrat hain,
Nirtka ke pāv hain, ke jūp kese dāv hain,
Ke chhal ko dikhāu, kou tese behrat hain.
Hān ke baji bir hain, tuphang kese tīr hain,
Ke anjalī ke dhīr hain, kd dujā se phirāt hain.
Lehran anang ki, tarang jese gang ki,
Anang kese ang, jeūn nā kaū thehrat hain. (171)

The horses are as quick in speed as the eyes of a fickle woman, or the words of a dexterous quick-witted man, or the whirlwind in the sky or the rhythm of the feet of a dancer, or the quickness of the trick of a gambler or the swiftness of the craft of a knave or jugglery of a magician, or the speed of the bullet of a gun, or the speed of an arrow released with great force, or the flash of beauty, or the fluttering of a banner, or the rapidity of the movements of the sexual intercourse, or the upsurge of the waves of the Ganges; they were ever restless and moving, never never at rest.

In extreme anguish or pain, one cannot talk many words. Long talks, discussions and dialogues vanish; instead one talks in single, limited words. This type of agony was created at the time of banishment. It has been depicted in beautiful Nagas half chhand as :

Na bājiai . na bhājiai
Raghues ko . Banes ko. (207)

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The queen repeated the fatal words to send Rāma, the incarnate to the woods and fulfil the promise without any reservation and fear.

Nares ji, uses ji.
Ghūmaīn gire, dharā gire. (210)

In anguish and bereavement, King Daśaratha, cried in pain, and extremely bewildered and feeling giddy, he staggered and fell down.

When the warriors fight in the battle-field, their swords clink, their arrows whiz and there is a strange type of music produced with the armament and falling of the heroes, etc. This type of music has been produced with the sound of certain words introduced in the beginning of the first line of verses in an extremely appropriate way in sangeet Chhape Chhand :

Nagarh di narāntak girat, Dagarh di devāntak dhāeo,
Jagarh di judh karat mal, Sagarh di sur lok sidāeo,
Dagarh di dev rahansat, Agarh di asuran ran sogang,
Sagarh di sidh sarsant, Nagarh di nāchat taj jogang
Khankhagarh di khaye bhaye prapat lakh,
Pagarh di pohap dārat amar
Jangagarh di sakal jai jai jampai, Sagarh di sur purai nār nar (392)

After the fierce fight, Narāntaka, the mighty demon, fell down dead with a thud and in his place Devāntaka appeared on the scene quickly. He roared in war-delight and engaged in fierce combat. Though proud in valour, he was slain, with a fatal blow. The Rākṣasas were smitten with grief. There was intense sorrow in the vast army. The gods were greatly delighted in excitement the destruction of Narāntaka and showered flowers and sung the glory of Rāma, the incarnate, in jubilation.

In another Chhand named Nav Namak, the rhyme and rhythm is worth appreciating :

Tar bhar per sar, nirkhat sur nar.
Har pur pur kar, nirkhat ber ner. (454)

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The gods in heaven, beheld the whole city of Laṅkā, over-cast with arrows. The whole city was besieged by the Vānaras.

There is another wonderful, Tarrinin Chhand (Metre), depicting how the arrows were released, how they pierced the warriors, how the shields banged and how sparks of fire were emitted :

Trinnin tērang, Brinin bīrang
Dhunnan Dhālang, Jannan jwālang. (533)

Whizzling the arrows were released, with a shrill the warriors were pierced. The shields clanked and constantly emitted sparks.

In fact the words in which they have been written cannot be translated and explained properly in the true spirit. Language fails to help.

In another Chhand, as the speed of the battle enhances, so the speed of the metre becomes faster still. It is written in Trigodha Chhand :

Tak tērang, bab bērang
Dhadh dhālang, Jaj jwālang (541)

Volleys of arrows were showered. The warriors reeled, roared and screamed. The shields rattled and emitted sparks of fire.

There is another wonderful metre named Chhachri Chhand. When Lava and Kuśa fight, it depicts how bravely they take up swords :

Uthāē, dikhāē
nachāē, chalāē (737)

They drew swords, brandished it, swirled it and swept the enemies.

The whole scene of fighting is depicted in four words so artistically that the fighting heroes in action become vivid in the imagination. The whole description is so clear, strong, concise and vigorous that you are filled with reverence to see the poetic art and erudition of Guru Gobind Singh.

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Some Salient verses

Some of the descriptions, dialogues, and discussions are so marvellous that they are worth mentioning. The dialogue between Paraśurāma and Rāma :

Yo jab bain sune ari ke, tab sri ragubir bali balkāne
Sāt samundaran lo girve, gir bhūm akās doyu behrāne
Jachh bhujang disa bedisan ke, dānav dev doyū dar māne
Sri raghunath kamān le hath, kahe ris ke keh paīs ratāne
(149)

After hearing the arrogant speech of the haughty Paraśurāma, Rāma retorted that those who were like high and mighty mountains had falled deep into the ocean. All the gods, Nāgas and the demons were afraid of him. He challenged him to show him the place where his shaft could be discharged :

Jaitak bāīn kahe so kahe, jo pe pher kahe to pe
jitan jai ho
Hath hathiar gehe so gehe, jo pe pher gehe, to pe
pher na lai ho
Ram riseran māīn raghubīr, kaho bhaj ke kat prān
bachai ho
Tor sirasan Shankar ko, har Siya chale gher jān na
pai ho (150)

Paraśurāma replied in fury to Rāma, that he was demented and perverse, he should stop his senseless and reckless words, or he shall be in the jaws of death. He should surrender his arms. He should also learn about his glory, might and fierceness of temper. If he still persisted in fighting and did not restrain his passion he shall not be allowed to take Sītā along, although he has broken Śiva's mighty bow.

In reply to these haughty words, brave though young, Rāma replied in appropriate words :

Bol kahe, so sahe dij ju, jūpē phēr kahē to pē prān
khavāi ho
Bolak āīnth kahān sath jīū, sabh dānt turai abay
ghar jāī ho
Dhīr tabē lahē hai tum kaū, jab bhīr pari īk tīr
chalai ho
Bāt sambhār kaho mukh te, in batan ko ab hē phal
pai ho (151)

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I have patiently heard your rude and haughty words. If you repeat again, you will lose your life the next moment. You will become tormented fiercely and rendered unable to take up arms. You will be put to permanent rest for your sharp tongue, if you do not talk sense.

Hearing these bold, courageous and firm words of Rāma spoken with confidence, Paraśurāma retorted :

Tab tim sāch lakho man maiñ, prabh jaū tum rāmāvtar kahāo
Rudar kuvand brihand karyojīm, tum āpno bal mohe dikhāo
Tohi gadhā kar sarang chaker, latā bhrig kī ur mad suhāo
mero utār kuvand mahanbal, mohe ko āj charai dikhāo
(152)

In a contemptuous rage, Paraśurāma retorted that Rāma should forget himself as the incarnation of Viṣṇu, the effulgent by breaking the bow of lord Śiva. His doubts could only be removed if he drew the mighty and formidable bow of Lord Viṣṇu, belonging to his ancestors :

Śri raghubīr, siroman sūr, kuvand līo kar maiñ hus keī
Līo chap chatak charhāi bali, khat tūk kīo chhin māīn kas keī
Nabh ki gati tahi hati sarsoñ, ad bīch hī bāt rahī bas kai
Nab sāt, kachhu nat ke bat jīūn, bhav pās nisang rehiophas kai. (153)

Rāma, the exalted among warriors, picked up the mighty and formidable bow of Bhrigu. No sooner did he stretch it, than it broke into six pieces. A lad of sixteen years dazzled and baffled Paraśurāma, the axe bearer.

It is only a brave man who can appreciate esteem and recognise the worth of an act of bravery. So how Paraśurāma felt after seeing an act of bravery is narrated :

Bhēt bhuja bhar aṅg bharē, bhar nāīn doyū nirkhe raghuraē.
Gūnjat bhrīṅg kapolan ūpar, nāg lavang rehē līv laē.
Kanj kurāng kalā nisi ke, her kokal hēr hiē hahraē.
Bala lakhē chhab khāt parē, kahē bātchalē nirkhē adhka.
(154)

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Paraśurāma embraced and clasped Rāma, in his arms. With eye filled with love and affection, he looked at his dazzling features. His whole soul was set on his lovely cheeks like a maggot. His lotus-eyes, moon-like face, and honeyed words beseached him. Lying on a bed, Rāma looked like a lad, most beautiful, most graceful that the eyes got fixed on him and Paraśurāma could not move them from him.

There is another verse which must be mentioned about the sword of Rāma.

Ūjal usidharāng last apārang, karan lujhārāng
chhabidārang.
Sobhat jim ārang ati chhabi dhārang, sūbid sudhārang
arigārang.
Jai pattar dāti māddan māti saron rāli, jai karanang.
Durjan dal hanti achhal jayanti, kilvikh hanti bhai
haranang. (589)

The bright saber of Rāma, flashed, diffused brightness like storm of lightning, chopped the bodies and stroke the arms. It looked incomparably and magnificently radiant. Bathed in blood and besmirched with gore it appeared like red hot iron furnace. Most skilfully and tactfully, it destroyed the enemy-host. It reckoned the most arrogant presumptuous and intoxicated in blood. It was that destroyer of the enemy's vast host, warriors bestower of victory to the holy ones, remover of pain and affliction, annihilator of the terror and troubles. Everyone sang the glory of the magnificent, exalted and heavenly sword of Rāma.

Another verse in which the description of Rāvaṇa, the demon-King, his ten heads and twenty arms is given is worth mentioning :

Chandar hās ekankar dhāri.
Dūti dhap seh triti katāri.
Chatrath hathi saihathi ujiāri.
Gofan gūraj karat chamkāri. (602)

Rāvaṇa, the twenty-armed demon-king, held in one hand the special sword obtained from Lord Śiva. In the second hand he

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held a fine rapier. In the third a dagger and in the fourth he held a dart, in the fith a sling and in the sixth a mace.

Pate sahas bhāri, gadeh ubhārī,
Trisūl sudhāri jhurkāri.
Janbua arbānang, sukan kamānang.
Charam anūpanang dhar bhāri.
Pandre golālang pās amolang,
Paras adolang hath nālang.
Bichhūa pehrāung patā bhramāung,
Jim jim dhāung bikrālang. (603)

Rāvaṇa held the double-edged scimitar in his seventh hand, in his eighth he held a club, in the ninth a Triśūla, in the tenth a sharp knife, in the eleventh a Tambura and in the twelfth arrows, in the thirteenth a formidable bow, in the fourteenth a heavy shield, in the fifteenth a pallet bow, in the sixteenth a noose and in the seventeenth an axe, in the eighteenth an auto gun, in the nineteenth a dagger and in the twentieth a sabre. In this way in a horrible and dreadful appearance, he rushed forth :

Shiv shiv shiv mukh ek uchārang.
Dutya prabhā jānakī nihārang.
Tritya jhund sabh subhat pachārang.
Chatrath karat mār hi mārang. (604)

Rāvaṇa the ten-headed, chanted the name of Siva with one face, with the second he beheld the charming Sītā, with the third, he challenged the warriors and with the fourth he shouted 'kill them', 'kill them'.

Pachai hanvant lakhdut mandang, sabal dūrantang taj kalinang.
Chhatai lakh bharātang tak tap pātang, lag tan ghātang jie jalang.
Satai lakh raghupati kapidal adipati, subhat bikat mat jut bharātang.
Athio sir dhorei, navam nihorei, dasyan bourei risrātang. (605)

The fifth face of Rāvaṇa, the ten-headed, was beholding the marvellous appearance of Hanumān, his strength, radiance and blissful appearance. The sixth face was looking at his real

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brother, Vibhīṣaṇa, who was responsible for his downfall. He felt irritated, wounded and extremely angry to see the treacherous brother. The seventh head beheld Rāma, the commander of the monkey-host, the tenacious warrior with whom his foolish brother had joined hands. The eighth head was most irrational and foolish. The ninth face was making entreaties while the tenth was made with fury.

Similies and metaphors

If we ever want to taste the cup of great poetry, if we ever want to realise its greatness, if we ever want to take delight in its high sources, we can never dispense with its art and diction, shape and size, sound and rhythm, similes and metaphors, hints and suggestions, attributes and epithets. Guru Gobind Singh was perfect in this poetic art. He applied all the methods, procedures and arrangements to make the Rāmāyaṇa complete in all respects.

The whole narrative is decorated and ornamented with beautiful similies and metaphors.

He has used seventy-one types of various metres to produce different and non-identical effects. All the metres vary in length, shape and size. There are metres which produce martial sounds, martial imagery and martial scenes. A select few are given below :

Bāj gajīrath sāj gire dhar, pattar anaik su kaun gināvai.
Phagan paun prachand bahai, ban pattran te jan pattr udāvai. (609)

When Rāma, dischraged the formidable arrow, the horses, the elephants, the chariots, the armours, and innumerable hosts of demons fell on the ground like the leaves falling in the winter wind-storm.

The simile used in this verse is so wonderful, the imagery so clear and vivid that you are inspired with the feelings of reverence and awe :

Bāj gajirath rāj rathi ran, bhūm gire ih bhāut sanghāre.
Jāno basant ke ant samai kadli-dal paun prachand ukhāre. (610)

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The horses, elephants, chariots and drivers all fell on the ground like the bananas uprooted and thrown on the ground by the whirlwind storm at the end of the spring season.

These similes imply that while in the battle-field, fighting fiercely, Guru Gobind Singh could imagine how the enemy-hosts fell on the ground. To see his imagery, personification and clarity of thought, let us examine another verse which makes the scene vivid, distinct and clear :

Rāvan ros bhareo ran main geh bēson hī bāhain
hathiar prahāre.
Bhoom ākās disā badisā chak chār chuke nahi jat
nihāre.
Phokan tei phal tei, mad tei, ad tei, badh kei,
ran mandal dāre.
Chhattar duja bar bāj rathi, rath kat sab hei
raghurāj uṭṭārei. (619)

In terrible wrath Rāvaṇa wrought havoc by assaulting with weapons held in his twenty arms. Earth, sky and all the regions were terror-stricken and stood aghast. Thereupon Rāma with his sharp arrows struck off the royal umbrella of Rāvaṇa, the demon King, smote the banner, pierced the horse, crushed the chariot and smashed the charioteer. In this manner Rāvaṇa was thrown violently on the ground like the peel of the fruit.

In another simile it is shown how the monkey-army attacked the enemy-forces :

Jānak sichan māṣ lakh tūte (598)

He pounced upon the enemy like the hawk on a piece of flesh.

masihāre bhukiāe tim ari dhai (599)

They pounced upon the enemy like wild animals.

Mukh tambor ar rang surangang, nider bharmant
bhūm uh jangang
Lipat malei ghansāi surangang, rūpwān gatiwan
uttangang (600)

The mouths of the warriors were red as if they had taken betel leaves. Bathed in blood they moved about undauntedly. It

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appeared as if they had applied deep red colour of the kapoor flower on their bodies but they looked terribly charming.

How Rāma addresses his sword when he comes face to face with Rāvaṇa, the demon King, in the battle-field, and this is described in a beautiful way. It is an excellent piece of personification :

Gaje mahansūr ghumi ran hūr, bhrami nabh pūr
bhakang anūpang
Vale val sānē, jivāīn iugān tānē, tain te gholijānī,
alanvin aise
Lago larthane, barhe raj māne, kaho aur kāne hathi
chhād khēsang,
Baro ān moko, tajo ān toko, chalē dev loko,
taje teg laṅkā (607)

Rāma, the mighty warrior, moved swiftly in the battle-field like a dancing fairy. Addressing his sword he said, "May your Lord be blessed till eternity, I dedicate my life to you, O mighty one. Perform some remarkable deed today." The sword spoke to Rāvaṇa, the demon King, "O my Lord, I beseech your honoured company today. Leaving you the most arrogant one, whom else can I wed? Do wed me and proceed to Heaven leaving Laṅkā behind."

Rāmāyaṇa, Rāmacaritamānasa and Rāmāvatāra, a comparison

The *Rāmāyaṇa* written by Maharshi Vālmīki, the *Rāmacaritamānasa* written by Goswāmī Tulasīdāsa and the *Rāmāvatāra* written by Shri Guru Gobind Singh are three great epics. All the three writers have brought up the story in their own way, enriched it with their own experiences, ornamented it with their own capabilities, and introduced their own styles. There are some striking differenes which are brought out here :

(i) Maharshi Vālmīki was a holy saint, a sage of great repute and a great personage of his times. Being a Rishi, he has delineated the past of his characters. It is his privileged style, which no one else could bring out, but being a sage, it was within his capacity.

Goswāmī Tulasīdāsa was a saint, a devotee, or a Bhakta. He has written the story of *Mānas* in a devotional attitude, in a

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reverential way and with great respect and affection. He has raised the hero of the story to the status of a worshipped deity.

Shri Guru Gobind Singh, the writer of *Rāmāvatāra* was a holy saint, a spiritual leader and tenacious warrior. He brought out an aspect of the hero of his epic which only a warrior could bring out. His hero is a great warrior. He has great martial powers. He is strong enough to fight with great hosts of enemy force. He has a rare power of resistance. He is excellent in the science of archery. He is perfect in wielding the sword. He is vigorous enough to strike down thousands single-handed. He is fearless and forceful.

(ii) Vālmīki has written the whole epic in two metres of poetry. Maharshi was not a poet by birth. He was inspired to write the great epic on hearing the wailings of Maharāṇī Sītā, banished in the forest. On hearing the woeful cries of the holy Sītā, his heart melted and flowed into a flood of poetry.

Goswāmī Tulasīdāsa was original in thinking and tender in feelings. He was forced by the exceptional circumstances into the realm of spiritualism and poetry. He surrendered himself to the devotion of his deity. The Goddess of Muse descended on him and inspired him to write the great epic. He has used only three metres, Dohā, Chaupai and Soṛṭhā.

Shri Guru Gobind Singh was a poet of high merit by birth. He was a great scholar. He was thoroughly skilled in the art of poetry. He has exhibited his excellence in using seventy-one types of metres in the great epic. He surpassed all in the art of poetry and erudiction.

(iii) The characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are common human beings. They have many weaknesses. They are emotional, they cry, they weep, they say harsh words in anger, they get upset in odd situations.

The characters of *Rāmacaritamānasa* are very reasonable. At the time of disturbed situations, they do not get emotional but seek their higher sense, reason and judgement and act moderately. They have control over their tongue, they do not use rough and harsh words.

The characters of *Rāmāvatāra* believe in the acts of God and the Divine Will. They take the oddities of life as acts of

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Supreme power. They talk sense, they are sagacious and do not use harsh words. They talk softly, gracefully and with full propriety.

To illustrate these is not out of place :

(*a*) In *Rāmāyaṇa*, Daśaratha says to Rāma, 'While yet Bharta is away, I want to perform your coronation ceremony." On hearing this, Rāma keeps silent. This shows that the King and Rāma were aware that if Bharata was present, he may demand his right.

In *Mānasa*, Daśaratha makes the declaation of coronation through the Rāja Guru and does not take advantage of the absence of Bharata.

In *Rāmāvatāra*, the King Daśaratha takes counsel of the Rāja Guru and seeks his advice, considers his opinion and takes joint decision.

(*b*) In *Rāmāyaṇa,* Kausalyā says to Rāma : "Son, during your presence here I used to be humbled by my co-wife (Kaikeyī); now when you go to forest, how will I be treated by her and how will I survive? Your father has ordered you to go the forest; I am your mother, I order you not to proceed to the forest."

In *Mānasa*, Kausalyā does not feel the sting of the co-wife. She advises Rāma to act in accordance with the orders of his father and mother.

In *Rāmāvatāra* also, Kausalyā does not feel the sting of the co-wife. She embraces his son and with tears in her eyes, she blesses him and gives him good wishes.

(*c*) In *Rāmāyaṇa,* Rāma says to Sītā : "Do not talk of my virtues to Bharata in my absence. Those in power would not like others' praise," and cannot stand my greatness.

There is nothing like this in *Mānasa* or *Rāmāvatāra*.

(iv) Maharishi Vālmīki wrote the great epic and introduced it through Lava and Kuśa in the court of Rāma. At the time of Aśvamedha Yajña, the two children sing *Rāmāyaṇa* most melodiously. Through Maharshi Vālmīki, Rāma comes to know that they were his sons and Sītā was as pure as the water of the Ganges. He asks Sītā to be brought back in the presence of the huge gathering, present at the time of Aśvamedha Yajña. He

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demands another Agni Parīkṣā from her for the satisfaction of public and his glory. Hearing this, Sītā prays to the Goddess Earth and disappears.

Goswāmī Tulasīdāsa is very tender in feelings. He cannot bear the idea that the deity of his devotion can ever banish Sītā, who was ever pure and holy. He has not dwelt on this part of the story. After Rāma's return from Laṅkā, he writes about his great accomplishments.

Guru Gobind Singh was a great soldier, excellent in the art of fighting. In *Rāmāvatāra*, he has brought out the fact that the sons of Rāma, were as good in fighting as he was. When the horse of the Aśvamedha Yajña is released, it is caught by the two boys. They fight firece battle with Śatrughna, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and many other warriors. On asking them to release the horse, the boys challenge them to fight. In the end, Rāma, the incarnate, also comes. In full enthusiasm, they fight so violent a battle that they throw all the heroes inert on the ground. It is through the earnest service of holy Sītā that Rāma and his forces are brought back to life. Rāma recognises the purity of Sītā and takes her to his kingdom. They live happily for many years. One day the friends of Mahāranī Sītā inscribe the name of demon-king Rāvaṇa. On seeing it, Sītā gets frightened. Unexpectedly Rāma happens to come there. He was infuriated to see the name of Rāvaṇa and accused Sītā of having some consideration for the demon-king. Thereupon Sītā becomes immediately agitated for being suspected about the purity of her character, prays to Mother Earth for protection. Mother Earth opens up and takes Sītā, the Pure, into her bosom.

(*d*) Maharshi Vālmīki gives human quality to his characters in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In the case of Sītā however he speaks very highly of her and the purity of her character. He stands witness to her character before Rāma at the time of Aśvamedha Yajña.

The significance of the following verse of Goswāmī Tulasīdāsa in *Rāmacaritamānasa* is beyond comprehension :

Dhol gaṁvar śūdra paśu nārī
ye sab tāḍan ke adhikārī.

Goswāmī Tulasīdāsa was very tender in feelings. It is impossible to imagine that he could tolerate the presence of his

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mother, wife, sister and daughter along with donkeys and dogs. It seems someone else has introduced this dohā in the great epic; it pollutes the *Mānasa.*

Guru Gobind Sigh has given a very high status to Sītā. When she saw Rāma, among the wounded warriors she bewailed and wanted to immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her Lord Rāma, the incarnate. At that time she heard the voice from heaven, "Hearken, O holy Sītā, why behave like an ignorant? Bring water and sprinkle it on the wounded and they will revive." Hearing of these words and reviving the wounded with water and miracles of high order, attained through purity of character. Again at the time of exit from the stage of worldly existence she says :

"If in my imagination
I have ever thought of anyone else,
But Lord Rāma,
If in my words,
I have ever uttered the word of anyone else
But Lord Rāma,
If in my deeds,
I have ever acted as a wife of anyone else,
But Lord Rāma,
Then Mother Earth may take me
In her holy embrace."

Instantaneously, the Earth splits, and takes holy Sītā in her eternal lap. This is a miracle of the extreme order exhibited at the time of great anguish by very pure and holy people.

Rāmāyaṇa in Punjabi literature from the last century

From the last century, because of the press facilities, the *Rāmāyaṇa* has been written in many languages and published in thousands. There are many translations available in Hindi language but there is no *Rāmāyaṇa* in Punjabi language.

The scarcity of *Rāmāyaṇa* in Punjabi language was felt by:

(i) Shri Amar Nath Chopra, Sub-Judge (1857-1905). He used to write in English and Urdu. It was very late in life that he felt the need to write in Punjabi. He translated Vālmīki

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Rāmāyaṇa into Punjabi, giving the meanings of the difficult words of Sanskrit in Punjabi.

(ii) In 1953, Brij Lal Shastri, wrote the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki under the caption of *Rāma Kathā* in prose. It was published by Punjabi Department, Patiala. He made another attempt in 1955 to write it in verse. He completed this volume of *Rāma Geet* poetry form. *Rāma Kathā* is the translation of Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* in prose and *Rāma Geet* is the narrative in poetry. It has been written without any alteration. The language used is very simple, accurate and full of idiomatic expressions. *Rāma Geet*, written in second attempt, has been composed in one metre only. The rhyme and rhythm of the metre is like the flow of river in rainy days. Having used only one metre the writer has felt the difficulty in expression of various emotions.

Gyani Sant Singh is another writer who has written Tulasī *Rāmāyaṇa*, Saṭīka with (Commentary). It was published in 1894 by Munshi Nawal Kishore, Lahore.

Gyani Ishar Singh Nara has translated the *Kavitāvalī Rāmāyaṇa* of Goswāmī Tulasīdāsa in Punjabi language in 1957.

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THE RĀMĀYAṆA IN KASHMIRI LITERATURE AND FOLK-LORE

By **P. N. PUSHP**

The Rāma-theme entered the Kashmiri language much later than the Kṛṣṇa-legend. This was so in spite of the fact that Sanskrit literature produced in Kashmiri recorded not only awareness of the Rāma-tradition but also its incorporation into critical as well as creative writing.

The views of the *Dhvanikāra* as to how *śoka* was transformed into *śloka* are matched only by Kālidāsa's classical utterance: *ślokatvam āpadyata yasya śokaḥ*; while the pithy observation of *Mammaṭa* (in his *Kāvyaprakāśa*) that 'one should behave like Rāma, etc., and not like Rāvaṇa, etc.' (*Rāmādivad vartitavyam na Rāvaṇādivat*) has become our national heritage. The *Rāmāyaṇa-mañjarī* of Kṣemendra that appeared alongside his *Bhāratamañjarī* and *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī*, is not (as is generally taken for granted) merely an abridgement of Vālmīki's masterpiece, but is also a re-doing of certain portions that specially captured his imagination. Kṣemendra's handling of the story in his *Kanaka-Jānakī*, and of the incarnation of Rāma in his *Daśāvatāracaritam* also bears out that the Rāma-tradition was very much alive in the literary memory of the Kashmiri. Even the *Kathāsaritsāgara* of Somadeva has preserved certain anecdotes of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, including a few not found in Vālmīki's work, but shared in part by versions peculiar to Khotan and Tibet. The stray verse on the Rāma-theme, quoted by Kṣemendra in his works on poetics and metrics, also bear out the fact that Sanskrit in Kashmir exulted in variations on the theme.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the folk-tale, traditionally handed down in Kashmiri about the travails of Rāma and Sītā, and the affectionate devotion of Lakṣmaṇa are not confined to the Hindus but are widely shared the non-Hindu population as well, most of whom (by the way) happen to be converts. In fact the Kashmiri language itself has crystallised this legacy into telling expressions, including place-names, allusions, idioms and

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proverbs. Thus we have not only Rāma-nāga, Rāma-kuṇḍa and Sītā-kuṇḍa, but also Rāmabhadruny dūny (*i.e.*, the bow of darling Rāma) for the rainbow. The word *Rāmāyaṇa* itself has come to signify in Kashmiri 'a lengthy tale of unmerited woe', indifference to which is caricatured in the proverb :

"Rātas vonmay rāmāyaṇ;
Subhan prutshhtham, Rām kyā vātihē Sītāye"

Throughout the night I narrated the *Rāmāyaṇa*; on the morn (yet) you asked me 'Who was Rāma to Sītā indeed'.

Even some modern poets like Rasal Mir and Mahjoor have used the names of Rāma and Sītā for telling effect in tragic situations, and the name of Rāvaṇa for spiritual loss caused by evil endeavour, as *rāvuṇ* in Kashmiri means : 'Rāvaṇa' as well as 'to get lost'.

In the light of such a situation it is quite understandable that the Rāma-legend should have been very much there in Kashmiri folklore too. True, it is not as prominent as the Kṛṣṇa legend. Yet, it is there even in the earliest strata of the Kashmiri folk music as preserved in *Vanavun*, the traditional wedding-songs of the Kashmiris, in which allusion to the Rāma-story may not be as frequent as that to the Kṛṣṇa-theme. Thus, for instance, in the symbolic improvisation with reference to the grooms and their parents, the names of Rāma and Sītā, Daśaratha and Kausalyā, or even those of Janaka, Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha occur quite often.

According to this improvisation, generally the name of Vasudeva is interchangeable with that of Daśaratha, and correspondingly that of Kṛṣṇa with that of Rāma. Thus the snatch of a song like :

"Vasudiv rāzani sombrith bāi tṣuy
Kṛṣṇa juvanē mānzirātṛ kity."

becomes :

"Daśaratha rāzani sombrith bātṣuy
Rāma juvanē mānzirāts kity."

i.e., "At Vāsudeva's have assembled kith and kin in connection with Kṛṣṇa's henna-night."

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becomes :

> "At Daśaratha's have assembled kith and kin in connection with Rāma's henna-night."

But, apart from such cases of improvisation, specific mention of Rāma and Sītā is found in quite a number of these wedding songs. The bride is being dressed up for the wedding while her mother's parents and brothers are arriving with gorgeous wedding gifts (apparel as well as ornaments). Women, accordingly, sing :

> *"Daśaratha-rāzu'ny svandar kūrī,*
> *Rāmatsaṇḍur bōy ōy durybaṭa hyeth."*

(O beautiful daughter of king Daśaratha, your brother, Rāmacandra has come with wedding gifts for you.)

On the eve of the departure of the bridegroom's party, women's voice rises in chorus to the accompaniment of the tumbaknari, the Kashmiri kettle-drum :

> *"Tumbaknāre ruapay pazē*
> *aday vazē tumbaknār*
> *Shama rūpa Rāma gatshi Sītāyē"*

> "The tumbaknar deserves a rupee (coin)
> Then alone will it, the tumbaknar (agrees to) beat.
> The dark-complexioned Rāma will set out for Sītā."

Similarly in the appropriate context the women sing snatches like the following :

1. "Rāma has Lakṣmaṇa as the vice-bridegroom;
   The prince of Daśaratha has come indeed !"
2. "O Princess, do you approve of him?
   Rāma it is who has arrived at your window."

Reference to the episodes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are found incorporated into the lengthy wedding folk-ballads like the one with the refrain :

> *"Soriv tapareshev Sadāśiv"*

Which is replete with reference to a rich variety of flowers blooming forth in succession and to a wide coverage of cultural

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topography including the Daṇḍakavana which assumes alluring local colour, particularly in the portions that refer to the golden-haired Sītā escorted by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in exile :

"Sītāyiāsim sonasuṇdy kīshō
Khārith ta niyham daṇḍakavan
Rāma to Lakhyaman ta sūṭy dīshō
Soriv tapareshev sadāshiv."

"Sītā had golden tresses. They took her away from me to Daṇḍakavana; Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were seen with her. Meditate O ascetics, on Sadāśiv."

Sweet and charming is the description of a child receiving his first literary lesson, as Rāma going to his teacher with a wooden tablet in hand while his mother Kausalyā is waving her headgear over his innocent head, with the desire to avert the evil eye. With the golden pen of the King Daśaratha, Rāma scribbles on his silver tablet, the initial utterance, *Voma vom, i.e.,* the auspicious Om, followed by the two syllables of the word *Svasti* nomenclatured in Kashmiri svayamso and tyaviste. This corresponds to the 'Om Svasti' of the initial sentence *Om Svasti Siddham,* which, as Alberuni also observes, was characteristic of the Siddhamātrikā prevalent in Kashmir; and while receiving his first lesson by writing out and repeating it for the first time, the tiny pupil is endearingly called upon to remember Śrī Rāma.

"Rām gōm tsātahal athi hyeth dūji
Koshalyāyi zūjī ālavūs
Dasharatha rāzanē svānsūṇdi kalamo.
Rāmajuvan lyūkhanay vomā vom
Vōmāvom svayamso tyevyuste pārizē
dyānā sorizē Śhri Rāmun."

At the initiation into spiritual lore by the Guru the child is blessed that he may prove as worthy as Śrī Rāma.

"The Guru has whispered the word in your ear. May you prove as worthy as Śrī Rāma!

(*Gvaran vonanay kaṇytaly shabdā rabdā drōyō Shri Rāmun.*)

The Kashtawari dialect of Kashmiri also has preserved some wedding songs significantly referring to Rāma and Sītā, as the

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one sung at the moment when the bride is taking seven symbolic steps round the sacrificial fire.

"Yazmanbāyī kyāzi then revān
Rāmaji ta Sītāji thiy ptirnya divān.
Sāṇy beny vaṇī kyāzi thek..."

Relatives, friends and neighbours are consoling the distraught parents of the bride in moving strains :

"Why are you, O Mother of the bride, shedding sad tears?
Rāmaji and Sītāji are going round the fire.
Our Sītāji, why are you shedding sad tears?
O Father of the bride,
May your darling live long!
Why are you shedding sad tears?" and so on...

The folklore has thus a numḅer of ballads presenting variations on the theme of pathos that permeates the Rāma-story The most telling of these are the ones with the following refrains :

(1) "Rāma Lakhyman vanvāsī gav" which meant—
"Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (in the collective singular as Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa) has gone into exile!"

(2) "Vantay Rāmajiv bozina myōn?"
"Pray tell me, will not Rāmji, listen to me?"

(3) "Rām ta Lakhymaṇ artārī āv"
(Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa came as incarnate.)

These ballads recount the main events of the Rāma-story in effective folk-diction, characterised by local colour and colloquial utterance befitting local variations, such as

"Dasharatharāzuny santān āsiy,
Khasith ta vātiy Daṇḍakvan
Bihith ta kheaihay Vuapalhāk Khōasiy;
Rāmalakhyman Vanvāsī gav
Krājī Māsī bana kithy āsiy?
Akis kondē paynay āy
Aḍy drāy khaṇḍyphuṭy āḍy svanakhāsiy..."

"King Daśaratha's offspring were they, they that went to Daṇḍakavana. Sat they there and ate the wild spinach

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...O Potter auntie, what went wrong with the pots you made? These were baked all in a single kiln indeed; (yet) some came out fragmented, some golden cups..."

Or

"Kaushalyā dapān kas kyaka bāvikh
Rāmajuvas ani kus mananāvith?..."

"Says Kausalyā : to whom shall I confide my woe? Who'll persuade Rāma to come back to me? Pray go and ask him, Won't he come back my way again?"

But the masterpiece of a folk-ballad is an autobiographical one in which Sītā pours out the irony of her fate in gripping pathos. Her plaint is addressed to Rāma whom she euphimistically hails as : *Paramadām*, the Kashmiri version of *Paramadhāman, i.e.,* one of the highest stature. It is no wonder that such a masterpiece of folk poetry should have become incorporated into the *Prakāś Rāmāyaṇa*, written in the 19th century.

Thus the *Rāmāyaṇa* was there in Kashmiri folklore much earlier than it appeared in Kashmiri literature and there is nothing surprising about it. What is surprising however is that as an epic the *Rāmāyaṇa* did not appear in Kashmiri literature earlier than the forties of the nineteenth century. Such a peculiar situation becomes all the more puzzling when we find that the first full-fledged *kāvya* on the Kṛṣṇa-theme in Kashmiri appeared as early as the middle of the fifteenth century. It was composed by Bhaṭṭāvatāra, a court poet of the Sultan Zainualabidin (1420-1470 A.D.) on the romantic episode of Uṣā and Aniruddha, of course within the framework of the battle between Kṛṣṇa and Bāṇāsura as indicated by the title : *Bāṇāsura-Kathā* or *Bāṇāsura-vadha.* But such a situation ceases to be puzzling when we take stock of the literary landscape that conditioned the emergence of Kashmiri *Pabanda* or the *Prabandha-Kāvya.* Sanskrit had by this time been replaced by Persian as the Court language and the Persian *mathnavi* has been introduced into the valley. The extent to which its influence had spread can be clearly understood by the fact that even Śrīvara, the close associate and Sanskrit chronicler of the Sultan, had attempted in his *Kathā-kautuka* a Sanskrit version of Mulla Jami's Persian masterpiece, the *Yūsaf-Zulīkhā*. The

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Persian *Mathnavi*, obviously, found in the Kṛṣṇa-legend more congenial and suitable than the Rāma-story, in view of its wider scope for depiction of romantic love, than the Rāma-tradition could allow. The love at first sight depiced between Rāma and Sītā on the eve of the *Svayamvara* is that between two individuals destined to be united in wedlock, but does not admit of any free exchange of finer feelings that the *mathnavi* takes pains to depict. The pangs of separation suffered by Rāma and Sītā are those of husband and wife, and not of two lovers dying for each other, as for instance, in romantic poems like the *Yūsaf-Zulikhā* already referred to in connection with Śrīvara's Sanskrit version of it.

Yet the fact remains that during the Mugal period, the Persian *Rāmāyaṇa* came to Kashmir also. Of these Mulla Masīthī's masterpiece written during the time of Jahangir appears to have been widely read, as is borne out not only by the extensive dispersal of the manuscripts of the work in Kashmir, but also by the parallels and affinities found in the *Masīhī Rāmāyaṇa* and the Kashmiri *Rāmāyaṇa*, particularly the *Prakāś-Rāmāyaṇa*. Just two episodes may be referred to here by way of illustration. These are : (1) The episode of the mischief done by Rāvaṇa's sister by persuading Sītā to draw a sketch of Rāvaṇa; and (2) the episode where after Sītā has gone through the Agniparīkṣā, she shuts herself up in the Āśrama of Vālmīki and refuses to open the door in spite of Rāma's repeated entreaties and Vālmīki's recommendations. Rāma's appeals are repulsed by Sītā with her plaints recapitulating the wrongs done to her by Rāma.

The Persian Rāmāyaṇa, however, is not the main source of the Kashmiri Rāmāyaṇa written in the forties of the ninteenth century and after, the latest being the one written as late as 1940 A.D. The *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and the Paurāṇic accounts of Rāma, particularly those of the *Bhāgavata* and the *Śivapurāṇa* which were available in Kashmir, in Persian as well as the Bhāṣā, were duly drawn upon. And some of these Paurāṇic accounts also have been rendered into Kashmiri.

Here I feel I should first give a socio-cultural background to the period in which over half a dozen Rāmāyaṇas were written in quick succession. It was during the Sikh period that Rāgīs

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came to Kashmir and, alongside of the Sakhis and Bhajans of the *Granth Sahib*, sang and recited portions of the *Bhāgavata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* also, particularly the *Rāmacaritamānasa*. The Rāmalīlā tradition also entered the Kashmir valley and spread to various districts. Soon after, when the Dogra rule started, the Iṣṭa-deva of the Dogra rulers became more popular than other Avatāras from the literary point of view also, and the patronage extended to the poets writing on the Rāma-theme gave a fillip to the creative endeavours in this respect. Thus the first Kashmiri *Rāmāyaṇa*, that is the *Śaṅkara Rāmāyaṇa* written in 1900 V.S. (or 1843 A.D.) was transcribed from Śāradā into the Devanāgarī characters in the reign of Maharaja Rānbir Singh. The *Prakāś Rāmāyaṇa* written in 1846 A.D. was most widely copied out and is the only Kashmiri *Rāmāyaṇa* that has been printed in all the three scripts, Roman, Devanāgarī and Persian, three times in the Persian, twice in the Devanāgarī and once in the Roman. The third Kashmiri *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Viṣṇu Pratāpa Rāmāyaṇa,* was completed by Viṣṇu Kaul in 1913 A.D., the fourth, that is, *Śarma Rāmāyaṇa* by Nīlakaṇṭha Sharma was written between 1919-1926 A.D. on the model of Tulasīdāsa's masterpiece, a creative rendering of the Hindi text.The fifth was written by Tarachand in 1927 A.D. and the sixth by Amar Nath in 1940 A.D. The seventh, reported to have been written by Anand Rām, has not yet come my way.

Of these, as I have already pointed out, only the *Prakāś Rāmāyaṇa* has so far appeared in print; the remaining five are still in the manuscript. Yet they have their individual merit in terms of presentation as well as coverage, in response to the poet's right to select, to discard and to re-order the subject-matter, episodes as well as motifs, to suit his creative urge. In certain cases they have created myths on their own also. The latest, that is, the *Amar Rāmāyaṇa*, for instance, has given some episodes of the story modern interpretation, like Harijana uplift and widow-remarriage (pp. 126-29; 126-33, 209-10), with reference to the episodes Guha and Śabarī or the marriage of Vāli's widow to Sugrīva. While the Rāmagītā is a feature common to all these Rāmāyaṇas and betrays the influence of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, the variations on a common theme as, for instance, those on the birth of Sītā, are quite revealing.

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Śankara Rāmāyaṇa (Khanda 1, Adhyāya 6) has it that Sītā, the daughter of Rāvaṇa, as soon as born, was declared by the astrologers as inauspicious and ordered to be buried in Mithilā where she was dug up by Janaka while ploughing the fields during a famine.

Prakāśa Rāmāyaṇa (pp. 54-55, 57, 83, 154) adds to this that the infant was encased in a box and hurled into a river, and after being washed ashore was rescued by a washerman who took her to Janaka.

The *Viṣṇupratāpa Rāmāyaṇa* (Vana, Adhyāya, 129) records that the infant was born of Mandodarī who had conceived after inhaling the stinch issuing from a phial filled with the drops of blood of seven Ṛṣis. After that it repeats the story in the *Prakāśa Rāmāyaṇa.*

The *Śarma Rāmāyaṇa*, which is a fine rendering of the *Rāmacaritamānasa*, naturally follows Tulasīdāsa's version *in toto.*

The *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tārārcand, however, has quite a different story to say; it tallies to some extent with the account given in the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa.* According to him, some Ṛṣis present Rāvaṇa a pitcherful of blood; and Rāvaṇa orders his men to bury it in Janakapura so that it spells death for Janaka, the sworn enemy of Rāvaṇa, as soon as he digs it up with his plough.

The *Amara Rāmāyaṇa* (p. 29) has still another version which resembles the one recorded in the Jain *Uttarapurāṇa.* According to it, Rāvaṇa in his previous birth had molested a beautiful woman who, to avenge herself, is reborn as his daughter. The pitcher of blood presented to him by the Ṛṣis is handed over by him to Mandodarī who conceives after drinking it. On learning of it, Rāvaṇa causes her abortion and gets the still-born child placed in a pitcher and buried in Janakapuri. (I Adhyāya 13).

Broadly speaking, however, all these Kashmiri *Rāmāyaṇas* agree in presenting the main story, and imcorporate some version or the other as to the secondary aspects of the episodes like the birth of Sītā (whom, nevertheless, all describe as Mandodarī's daughter), the birth of Lava and Kuśa, the trial of Sītā's chastity and the final disappearance of Sītā into the lap of the Mother Earth.

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Another common feature of these Kashmiri *Rāmāyaṇas* is their interpretation of the story as an allegory of final victory of good over evil; and their concern to reflect their contemporary situation in the description of the Kaliyuga, as well as the emphatic need of ushering in the Rāmarājya, a spiritual utopia with specific socio-cultural contours of the people's aspirations. The Kaliyuga depicted by all these Rāmāyaṇas is, in fact, the reflection of the poets' contemporary predicament as far as he could comprehend it; and the ovation with which the Rāmarājya is greeted is just a reverberation of the people's reaction to the viciousness of the times.

Now, before I conclude with a sample of the folk ballad to which I have referred in the preamble of this paper, I would like to point out that it is necessary to undertake a project on the concordance of episodes, with their variations, and motifs in the Rāma-legends in Sanskrit as well as other languages (not only Indian but also Tibetan, Khotanese, Japanese, Malaysian, Indonesian and many others), in which some shade of the tradition is discernible. It is only on the basis of such a work that the correct perspective of the *Rāmāyaṇa*-stories can emerge and cry halt to impatient demands of those who would like everything to conform to one version or the other and would look askance at any deviation from what they are pleased to lay down as the norm. Let us not forget that a *Rāmāyaṇa* worth its name is a literary creation and has its genesis in the twin processes of selection and development. From this point of view any episode or motif incorporated or evolved in such work has its significance with reference to the times that have given birth to the work.

And now back to the autobiographical folk ballad in which Sītā pours her heavy heart after undergoing the trial of chastity. Here are a few lines in close translation :

"Hanumān arrived with a message for me
Hail, hail, O Rāma of high status !
Said he (Hanumān) : Śrī Rāma is coming to you himself.
Days of separation are over now.
This much was enough to sustain me.
Five days passed, and had I committed a sin?

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God knows what was whispered into his ears by whom?
He rendered me pinionless;
I withered away in the bud
Lakshman Ji came again to hoodwink me;
I was to be taken off to the woods;
He left me there, all alone;
.... Darkness overtook me at noon....
That day my star Bṛhaspati was in the ascendancy;
It was dead of night;
I gave birth to Lava and Kuśa;
All my regrets came to an end...
Even then you did not desist from taunting me
You have not yet got over your childishness, my darling Sir,
You shot an arrow at my breast,
.... Which came out no doubt, from my back
What, indeed, has Destiny written upon my brow?
Why, otherwise should I have suffered all this calumny?
Into the Earth shall I descend,
let Earth become copper.

This I believe gives voice to the ageless agony of the helpless womanhood and never ceases to be relevant to our times in spite of our attempts to explain away the socio-cultural implications of the Sītā's tale of woe. It is in depictions like these that the *Rāmāyaṇa* will survive as a great document of poetic, cultural and social legacy.

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THE RĀMĀYAṆA IN BENGAL

By **BHABATOSH DATTA**

I

Introduction

It is significant that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is one of the earliest literary specimens that the Bengali language possesses. There may have been others but only a few. We do not come across any literary remains that go as far back as fifteenth century. Excepting *Charyāpadas* (11th century) and *Śrīkrishna Kīrtan* (15th century), no work can claim to be so old as the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Krittivāsa (15th century). While *Charyāpada* lost its lieterary follow-up, *Śrīkrishna Kīrtan* of Badu Chaṇḍīdās left its stamp in the *Padāvalī Kīrtans* revitalised by the glorious advent of Shri Chaitanya in the 16th century. But in Bengal the *Rāmāyaṇa*-tradition has all along been a lining tradition since it was first composed. It did not have to look for any sustenance from outside for its unimpaired continuance. For the last five hundred years *Rāmāyaṇa* has continued to be composed and sung equally among the rich and the poor, from Assam to the lower Bengal.

This does not, of course, mean that Krittivāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa* has kept up its identity in language, style and the theme. On the other hand, perhaps no book of the medieval Bengal has undergone such tremendous changes. Scholars even doubt, whether the present text of the Krittivāsa's Rāmāyaṇa contains a single line composed originally by the poet. This we take as a tribute to the author. Because this shows how popular *Rāmāyaṇa* was and how the Bengali listeners passed days and nights listening to the recitation by the Kathakas with reverential attention. It was solely on account of its wide prevalence that the original text of Krittivāsa underwent such changes with the change of time and audience. In the medieval Bengal we had other literary ventures, *e.g.*, long narrative poems like *maṅgal-kāvyas*, beautiful songs known as *Padāvalī Kīrtanas*, adaptation from the *Bhāgavata* and *Mahābhārata*, some biographical works on Chaitanya and his distinguished followers. But we must admit that the *Rāmāyaṇa* perhaps was the most universal in its

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appeal. The *maṅgal kāvyas* are the stories of local village-gods like *Chaṇḍī, Manasā, Dharma.* The Vaiṣṇava devotees sang the *Kīrtanas* as part of their religious performances so that *Padāvalī* was somewhat communal in character. The *Mahābhārata* story had a particular dramatic appeal. But the disaster in the domestic life of henpeked king, banishment of a beloved prince for no fault of his, the natural suavity of a newly married wife, everlasting tie off brotherly affection—all these had a deeper and more abiding appeal among the masses. And thus the interest for the *Rāmāyaṇa* never flagged from the fifteenth down to the early part of the nineteenth century. Most of the composers choose the eternal theme of *Rāmāyaṇa* either in part or in whole even for a few decades after 1802 when the Bengali epic appeared first in print. Since then the *Rāmāyaṇa* has been printed over and over again and the variation in text known to be of Krittivāsa stopped to occur but what has been done during these previous centuries cannot be undone now and the original Krittivāsa is lost for ever. Our earliest *Rāmāyaṇa*-poet has remained still the greatest poet—the Mahākavi of the medieval Bengal in spite of time-worn changes and innumerable interpolations.

II

How the tradition of Rāmāyaṇa-Literature began

So far as our knowledge goes we do not know any one writing the *Rāmāyaṇa*-story in Bengali before Krittivāsa. Krittivāsa himself made no mention of any predecessor nor do we come across any other name mentioned by others. Krittivāsa must be taken as the earliest writer of the *Rāmāyaṇa* poem in Bengali. There is some controversy about the exact date of his birth but it is generally accepted that he flourished sometime in the early or middle 15th century, about one hundred years before Tulasīdāsa composed his immortal *Rāmacaritamānasa.* This assumption is based on an account given by the poet separately. We learn from this account that Krittivāsa, an inhabitant of Phulia in the South Bengal, went to North Bengal to complete his study. He attained mastery over Sanskrit and then went to meet a Hindu king there. The king, whose name the poet does not mention, was very much appreciative of his poetic ability and Sanskrit scholarship and commanded him to

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compose the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Bengali. Krittivāsa in this connection mentions three points which are relevant for us. First, he remembers Vālmīki as the greatest of the 'Munis'. Secondly, he sets himself to write this *Saptakāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa* at the command of the King. Thirdly, the poet clearly says that the aim of his writing this *Rāmāyaṇa* poem in Bengali was to make this divine creation (*Dever Srijit*) accessible to the common people.

From all these we are led to believe that there had been no Bengali version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* before Krittivāsa and that finding the young scholar eminently suitable to take up the arduous task of reproducing the *Rāmāyaṇa*-story from the Sanskrit, the king entrusted him to do so. We known very little about the actual social and cultural condition of those years after the Turkish invasion of Bengal in the 13th century. We really wonder what struck the King to have the Sanskrit epic done into vernacular. The narration of *Rāmacarit* in vernacular was a prohibited act as it will be seen from the following śloka—

Aṣṭādaśa purāṇāni Rāmasya caritāni ca
Bhāshāyām mānavaḥ śrutvā rauravam narakam vrajet

And still a Sanskrit Pandit undertook to do the work! It appears, there had been an urge felt among the common people for it. When the Hindu kings were dethroned in Bengal and the Muhammedan rulers took possession of it, naturally there was chaos and disorder for about a century after which there was a revival of Hinduism in a new form. A saviour who would bring back the lost faith and fight out the malevolent power was much looked for.

Rāmacandra had already been made an 'avatāra'—incarnation of Viṣṇu, as in the Daśāvātāra Stotra in the *Gītagovinda*—

Vitarasi dikṣu raṇe dikpatikamanīyam
Daśamukhamaulibalim ramaṇīyam
Keśava dhṛta-Rāmaśarīra jaya Jagadīśa Hare.

Had not Krittivāsa taken to write a full *Saptakāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa* we would not have been able to put forth such an explanation. Because several *Rāmāyaṇa*-scholars think that those two Kāṇḍas are later interpolations in which Rāmacandra has been represented as an incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu. From *Ayodhyā*

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Kāṇḍa, Laṅkā Kāṇḍa, nowhere Rāmacandra has been depicted by the Ādi Kavi as an *avatāra.* The fact that after Krittivāsa, we come across quite a large number of translations of *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* also shows that Rāma-episode was taken by the Bengalis to suit their particular social need. They found in Rāmacandra not an extra-ordinary god-like man but a god himself, much like the later Vaiṣṇavas to whom Chaitanya was *Kṛṣṇa-svarūpa* or Kṛṣṇa himself.

I am not sure, of course, if we can relate this revival of Rāma-glorification in Bengal with the religious movement started by Rāmānanda. Rāmānanda was born in about 1300 A.D. at Prayāga. 'Some of his pupils' says Prof. Bhandarkar, "became the founders of different schools and through them the worship of Rāma spread over an extensive portion of Northern and Central India, successfully competing with that of 'Gopala-Kṛṣṇa."[1] But it does not appear that there was any Rāma-cult in Bengal and in spite of Krittivāsa's endeavour to glorify Rāmacandra, the cult of Rādhā-Krishṇa gained greater popularity, especially due to Chaitanya's deeply religious devotionalism. From the practical point of view, however, the nature of Rādhā-Krishṇa cult was just the opposite of Rāma-cult. To quote Bhandarkar, "There is no amorous suggestion in her story as in that of Rādhā, and consequently the moral influence of Rāmaism is more wholesome."

Interestingly indeed there is scarce reference to *Rāmāyaṇa* in Vaiṣṇava literature. The period of Vaiṣṇava creative literature commenced from the fourth decade of the 16th century. The *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* by Krittivāsa may have been widely known by then. Brindāvandās, the earliest biographer of Chaitanya, gives an accoumt of *Rāmāyaṇa*-play. He also says that the *Rāmāyaṇa*-song moved the hearts of the Hindus and the Muslims alike. Jayānanda, another biographer, a few years later, says : The "Rāmāyaṇa of Mahākavi Vālmīki was rendered into *panchali*-form by the sensitive Krittivāsa". The most important fact with regard to *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Vaiṣṇavism is that out of five types of Bhakti the *'Dāsya Bhakti'* was modelled in Hanumān's devotion to Rāmacandra. Murārī Gupta, one of Chaitanya's associates, is really believed to be an incarnation of

[1] Bhandarkar, Sir R.G. *Vaisnavism, Saivism etc.* (Strassburg 1913), p. 67.

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Hanumān. But the *Dāsyabhakti* was not the highest type of devotion and *Śṛṅgāra bhakti* according to the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavas is the highest. And so it is no wonder that the great work of Rūpa Goswāmī, the *Bhakti-Rasāmṛta-sindhu* contains reference to *Rāmāyaṇa* only once.[2]

III

Characteristics of Bengali Rāmāyaṇa

It appears therefore that although Krittivāsa composed the *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* long before Chaitanya's Bhakti-movement, for all practical purposes, it was overshadowed by the more powerful Rādhā-Krishṇa cult. We do not of course find any reference to Rādha or Kṛṣṇa in the *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa,* yet the later *Rāmāyaṇa*-literature has been deeply surcharged with the Vaiṣṇava devotionalism. We cannot say with certitude what originally was the text, whether the different Purāṇic themes we now find in the *Rāmāyaṇa* were the innovations introduced by Krittivāsa, or they were later additions. So far as we can see there was a wide-spread Purāṇic revival during the 16th-17th centuries when Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism came into existence and the *Rāmāyaṇa* naturally could not escape its impact. As a result the *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa*, although it retains the old framework of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki, many Purāṇic as also indigenous stories and episodes have entered into it, making it impossible for the scholars to restore the original form.

But for the general readers it is no problem at all. They do not bother about the original text. Whatever may have been written by Krittivāsa, the *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* has assumed a character that has been given shape by the host of followers. There are other *Rāmāyaṇa*-poets too but they have been overshadowed by Krittivāsa. Curiously scholars have shown that the text known to be that of Krittivāsa is nothing but an admixture of various compositions by other less known poets. That was no impediment for the average Bengali readers who always enjoyed the recitation and singing of *Rāmāyaṇa* whoever may be the author. This has been the main source of their

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[2] De, S.K. *Early History of Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement* (Calcutta 1942), p. 151.

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moral and religious teaching, till the modern education was introduced in the nineteenth century. In that sense *Rāmāyaṇa* has remained the embodiment of the Bengali culture itself. Rightly this has been called the national epic of the Bengali people. Such an epithet has a double significance. First, the Bengali recension carries a typically Bengali domestic picture which is not to be found in the Sanskrit text. Secondly, it also contains anecdotes and episodes coming from the local religious beliefs. There are again sections which have been borrowed not from Vālmīki but from the Sanskrit Purāṇas.

The *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa,* it should be clearly understood was not a translation *verbatim* of the Sanskrit. It was as late as early nineteenth century when Raghunandan Goswāmī first attempted a translation of the Sanskrit original but that was "chiefly based upon Vālmīki but supplemented from other sources."[3] The Bengali recension generally followed Vālmīki with profuse variations in language, style and elaboration of themes. The Bengali authors grasped the opportunity to capture the interest of the listeners by depicting the pictures of Bengali home as Dr. D.C. Sen has very ably shown.[4] The customs, the practices, superstitions, beliefs, the vivid picture of a Bengali mother and a wife, the soft and emotional nature of a Bengali youth—all these have been depicted in place of Vālmīki's wonderfully impersonal and majestic description. Dr. Sen after attempting a short comparison between Vālmīki's epic and the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* says : "In the majestic sweep of Vālmīki's verses none of these petty details finds a place. Thus we see here how the Bengali Rāmāyaṇa wins for it a place in the heart of the Bengali rustics and artisans by artistically depicting the little familiar ceremonies that are daily occurrences in their homes." We also miss the beautiful description of nature, especially those of the Pampā, the rainy and autumn seasons, the solemn forest beauty as we naturally remain unacquainted with Vālmīki's brilliant use of metaphors and imageries.

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3 Sen, Dinesh Chandra, *The Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* (Calcutta University, 1920), pp. 82-88.

4 Dc, S.K., *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century,* (Calcutta, 1962), p. 387.

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The Bengali version contains many other things which do not occur in the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*. These are mostly to be found in the *Adi, Yuddha* and *Uttarakāṇḍas*. The *Ādikāṇḍa* does not maintain the order of the original, besides introducing so many Purāṇic stories, *e.g.*, stories of Chandravamśa and Sūryavamśa, Hariścandra, Rājā Saudāsa, Dilīpa, Raghu, Aja, Daśaratha's marriage with Kausalyā, Kaikeyī and Sumitrā, killing of the son of Andhamuni, killing of Śambarāsura and the promise made by Daśaratha to grant her prayer, birth of Sītā, apprehension of trouble by Rāvaṇa at the birth of Rāmacandra and so forth. Some of these topics are only elaboration of the context occurring in the subsequent *Kāṇḍas*. The episode of the robber Ratnākara turning into Maharṣi Vālmīki occurs in the beginning of the *Ādikāṇḍa*. This is a vary well-known story among the Bengali people. The origin of this can be traced to the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and it lays emphasis on the *nāma-kīrtan* or chanting of name.[5] This Vālmīki, in the popular belief, was an illiterate and cruel robber who was converted into a pious Ṛṣi only by repeatedly chanting the name of Rāma. But as he could not properly utter that sacred name, he was directed by Brahmā to utter the word inversely *i.e.*, *mara* and by repeating *mara-mara*, he was able at last to pronounce that name and was saved from eternal damnation. This story reminds us of the dictum, common among Bengali Vaiṣṇavas :

Harernāmaiva nāmaiva Harernāmaiva kevalam ।
Kalau nāstyeva nāstyeva nāstyeva gatirnayathā ॥

The same thing we again come across in the *Yuddha* or *Laṅkākāṇḍas* when the Rākṣasa heroes appear in the battle-field chanting the sacred name of Rāma.

In the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* certain interesting episodes have been added. A very common theme *Hara-Gourī-Kondal*—'Quarrel between Hara and Gaurī', so ofen found in *Maṅgal Kāvyas* serves as the background of the fight between Rāma and Rāvaṇa. Among other episodes are *Angada Raibar,* death of Vīrbāhu, *Bhasmalochan* and others, death of Taraṇisen, son of

[5] According to the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (II.15.65 ff) Vālmīki lived among robbers when he was a young man, though he was a Brahmin by birth and was taught *Rāma-nāman* by the seven sages, in the reverse order of the letters.

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Vibhīṣaṇa, story of Mahirāvaṇa and Ahirāvaṇa[6], granting of boon to Rāvaṇa by Abhaya, Durgāpūjā performed by Rāmacandra with 108 blue lotuses, etc. The last-mentioned episode has a peculiar tinge of the *Maṅgal Kāvyas*. The *Maṅgal Kāvya* goddesses often test the sincerity of their propagators by throwing them into various ordeals. Rāmacandra procured the required number of lotuses for ceremony but the Devī concealed one of those and waited to see what her devotee did. Failing to collect another lotus, he determined to take out one of his own eyes and place it at the Devī's feet. Just at the critical moment Devī appeared.[7]

The additional episodes enlisted are not actually taken from any Sanskrit Purāṇas. While the feat of Mahirāvaṇa creates suspense in the minds of the audience, the *Aṅgada-Raibar* has a humorous appeal and Taraṇisen's death arouses deep pathos. It has been noticed by the scholar that Vālmīki's Rāma-story is free from miraculous incidents at least up to the *Yuddha-kāṇḍa*. But the Bengali poet delights in the queer and the fantastic as we generally find in the folk-tales and *maṅgal-kāvyas*. Nothing prevents him from imagining Aṅgada to appear before Rāvaṇa in his assembly and engage in verbal battle. The audience naturally enjoyed the mutual hurling of invectives which provided them with some sort of relief. Taraṇisen is a young innocent boy, son of Saramā and Vibhīṣaṇa, called to proceed to the battle-field. He is a great devotee and eagerly waits to court death at the hand of Rāmacandra himself.

The *Uttarakāṇḍa* similarly contains some sections which do not occur in the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*. They are either collected from certain Purāṇas or elaborated from the original. What strikes the reader is the greater importance attached to the Rākṣasas. Practically the major part of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* has been given to the narration of Rāvaṇa's misdeeds. This, some scholars are inclined to believe, is due to influence of the Jaina

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6 The story of Ahirāvaṇa in *Rāmacaritamānasa* is somewhat similar to that of Mahirāvaṇa in Krittivāsa. While in Krittivāsa, Ahirāvaṇa is the son of Mahirāvaṇa, Tulasīdāsa makes no mention of Mahirāvaṇa.

7 This is an echo of the Purāṇic story of Viṣṇu plucking out his lotus-eye when he found he was short of one lotus in his worship of Śiva with one thousand lotuses. *Linga* I. 98. This is also well-known in the Devāram-hymns of the Tamil Śaiva Nāyanārs.

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Rāmāyaṇa. But the Bengali poet represents Rāvaṇa and the Rākṣasas as devotees of Viṣṇu. Their hostility is really the highest type of *bhakti* in disguise. This has been hinted in the story of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. We are not sure whether this idea goes back to the days of Krittivāsa in the absence of an authentic manuscript. But the hostility of Rākṣasas affords a remarkable parallel to that of Jagai Madhai and others who were transformed by Chaitanya's wonderful love. It is really remarkable to note how the simple, human story of Vālmīki changed its significance in course of oral transmission among the Bengali people. Rightly did Dr. D.C. Sen remark : "It appears that these sinners threw their mantle on the Rākṣasas of the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇas*, while Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were made to play the parts of Chaitanya and Nityānanda. The battle-field thus turned into a platform for sacred prayers and the fighting symbolised the spiritual struggle of sinners in the course of their transformatin. A new leaf was taken from the living history of the Vaiṣṇavas and joined to the old poem. The people as they found their own sentiments so beautifully portrayed in it were glad at the change."

Apart from the Vaiṣṇavic influence which changed the spirit of Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, there are stamps of other local elements. The middle Bengali Hindu society had different sects worshipping Kṛṣṇa, Kālī and Śiva. It is amusing that the *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* going out of the way from the original Sanskrit and narrates Chaṇḍīpūjā by Rāmacandra, also gives a detailed account of Tāntrik rites performed by Mahirāvaṇa. Mahirāvaṇa is a son of Rāvaṇa who on receiving summons from his father creates havoc by kidnapping Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Śiva is another popular God, debased from the grand Paurāṇic ideal, a *bhang*-addict, vagabond, indifferent beggar. Śiva and Rāma are brought in contact with one another and have been made to fight with each other. There is a separate narrative attributed to Krittivāsa on this quaint subject. This is under the name *Śiva-Rāmer Yuddha*. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, the most widely sung poem of the medieval Bengal has been changed at the hand of different poets to satisfy the taste of various sections of the people. The interesting point with regard to this book is that it absorbed different sectarian ideas to converge in the

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classic episode and yet the central hero of this epic who believed to be the incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu, was never worshipped as a sectarian deity.

IV

The Rāmāyaṇa-poets

The *Rāmāyaṇa* being the most widely read book of the medieval Bengal, has been related by a good number of authors. Not all of them reproduced the complete Rāma-episode. Many of the manuscripts are incomplete. Most of the poets did not even attempt to write out the *Saptakāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa*. We get *pālas* or story-divisions by different poets meant to be sung and recited, *e.g., Aṅgad-Raibar, Taraṇisen-vadha, Mahirābaner pāla, Śiva-Rāmer Yuddha, Lakṣmaṇer Śaktishel, Sītār Vanvās, Lava Kuser Yuddha.* Besides these *pālas* different *kāṇḍas* also were composed by different authors. There were a few authors who completed the *Sapta Kāṇḍas*. Among them were Mādhava Kandalī (16th century), Adbhutāchārya (16th century), Chandravatī (16th century), Kavichandra (18th century), Rāmānanda Ghosh (18th century) and Jagatrām (18th century). It is also significant that the *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* was mostly influenced by the *Adhbhuta-Rāmāyaṇa*. That accounts for the distortion of Vālmīki-story and a host of additions and queer interpretations that bring in it spiritual significance possibly not indicated by Vālmīki.

In medieval Bengal several types of narrating poems known as 'Panchali' were in vogue. Besides the *Rāmāyaṇa*, there were the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhāgavata*, biographies and tales of propagation of certain local gods and goddesses. We have extensive literature and manuscripts of all these. Before the introduction of the printing press, these *Panchalis* were regularly sung before the assembly of village-folks, not with any classical musical tune but with a sing-song tone made for the occasion. The singer was known as the Gāyen. The Gāyen with a garland around the neck used to stand in the midst of the assembly and sing. Kathaks are those who sit and narrate as they read out the verses. The Gāyen and the poet were not necessarily the same person. Sometimes when the manuscripts were they used to be copied by copyists mostly uneducated.

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Jayānanda, a 17th century biographer of Chaitanya, pays respectful homage to Krittivāsa as his predecessor. It appears therefore that Krittivāsa's reputation as a poet spread far and wide and there was one to equal him at least in respect of writing of *Rāmāyaṇa*. We do not come across any other woman-poet on the *Rāmāyaṇa* excepting Chandrāvatī, of the 16th century. Her *Rāmāyaṇa* has a distinctive feature in depicting the background of Sītā's exile. Krittivāsa gives a story in which Sītā was implored by her attendants to draw the portrait of the demon Rāvaṇa, so that they might have an impression of how he looked. Sītā drew it and then being tried closed her eyes in sleep. Just at that time Rāmacandra appeared and saw Sītā sleeping over the portrait of Rāvaṇa. That made him suspicious. Chandrāvatī gives an account of a deliberate and vile design of Kakuā, Sītā's sister-in-law. It was she who made Sītā to draw the portrait with a view to show it to Rāmacandra.

There is a similar incident narrated in the Jaina *Rāmāyaṇa* where Rāmacandra is shown to have married three more wives after returning from Laṅkā. These three queens were jealous of Sītā and made her to do what has been described by Chandrāvatī in the Bengali version. Dinesh Chandra Sen is of opinion that this is clearly the Jaina influence. "The legend of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as described by the Jaina poets", presumes D.C. Sen, "have at one time been current in this province. Hence it is that some of the additions which we find in the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇas* contain matter popularised here by the Jainas."

We have already referred to the *Aṅgada Raibar*. This is an important feature of the *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* although we are not sure of its authorship. Kavichandra of the 18th century is the ablest writer of this episode which has been incorporated in Krittivāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa*. Probably the story originates from Hanumān's first encounter with Rāvaṇa. Aṅgada similarly was imagined to have appeared before Rāvaṇa and made a parade of his valour. Undoubtedly the Bengali poet lacks Vālmīki's wonderful control over the situation, sense of proportion, balance and power of individualising character. The *Aṅgada Raibar* has remained a specimen of unsophisticated and crude humour. Besides Kavichandra there were other poets who tried their hands at *Aṅgada Raibar.*

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Another author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, believes himself to be an incarnation of the Buddha. He is Rāmānanda Ghosh of the 17th century. On several occasions Rāmānanda declares that he has come to restore the lost glory of the *Dāru Brahma, i.e.*, Jagannātha of Purī. His position is queer because he also believes in Hindu gods and goddesses. Probably he belonged to a small set called *Mahima dharmis* in Orissa whose religious doctrines are a mixture of Vaiṣṇavism and Mahāyāna creed. To him Rāmacandra and Dāru Brahman are one. In his *Rāmāyaṇa* he has largely followed *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* also. The *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* assumes many forms and Rāmānanda's book is one of them which combined Buddhistic, Śāktas and Vaiṣṇava elements.

It is not possible to dwell on each of the innumerable versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Bengal. We have only referred, and that very imperfectly, to the different endeavours to interpret this immortal classic in different ways. The history of the *Rāmāyaṇa* text is the undoubted proof of its wide popularity. What Vālmīki did in Sanskrit, the Bengali poets could not achieve in respect of poetic power but his epic has served as a wonderful resort to the variegated culture of the Bengali people.

V

Rāmāyaṇa in the folk literature

So far we have dealt with the *Rāmāyaṇa* mainly with regard to its theme; some of these cannot be traced to the Sanskrit epic. These have been incorporated from the folk life. Quite a considerable portion of our folk literature is based on the Rāma-Sītā legend. Undoubtedly this deserves intensive analysis, which I am afraid has not been done adequately in spite of the good deal of work done on the folk literature of Bengal.

Rabindra Nath Tagore, about seventy years back, engaged himself in collecting specimens of folk literature of Pabna-Rajashahi region of Bengal. In a paper published in the *Bhārati* (1898)[8] he observes that our folk literature was rich in the songs on Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Hara-Gaurī but compared with them songs

[8] Tagore, Rabindranath, *Loka Sāhitya* in his collected works, Vol. VI (Visva Bharati). See his article, *Grāmyasāhitya*.

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of Rāma-Sītā were scanty. "It must be admitted" he said : "In the west where Rāma-legend is widely prevalent, ideal of manliness is more powerful than in Bengal. In our Hara-Gaurī and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa legends, the mutual relationship between man and wife and lover and the beloved has been emphasised but no attempt has been made to make them morally wholesome. The ideal of conjugal life of Rāma-Sītā is much higher than that of Hara-Gaurī. It is unfortunate that Rāma-Sītā legend has never got the better of either Hara-Gaurī or Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa legends." It is true, we do not possess on Rāma and Sītā anything like Kṛṣṇa *padāvalī* or the *Śākta Padāvalī*. The 'Rāma Padāvalī' is quite unknown to us. Later researches, however, have shown that our folk art has been deeply influenced by the Rāma-Sītā legend. Tagore was, however, right in maintaining that the ideal of manliness is generally missed in our folk poetry. We are moved more with the emotional appeal of the Rāma-legend than the moral side of it.

There are stray songs composed by unknown composers. They were never before put down in writing. Sometimes they are sung as a part of village entertainment. The pathos of Sītā's exile moves the simple rustics. They listen to the narration of Daśaratha's surrender to his wife's desire and are moved with the voluntary exile courted by Rāma and so forth. These and such other subjects make direct appeal to them than the self-abnegation, integrity, devotion and the spirit of fighting evil displayed in the eventful story of Rāmacandra.

I should however modify my statement to say that there was at least one very remarkable type of Bengali folk art in which the Rāma-episode is reproduced in a vigorous way. The Chhau dance of Purulia is a particular type of mask dance, which has of late attracted attention of the sophisticated world. This dance is based mainly on the themes taken from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. These are not necessarily those contained in the Sanskrit epics. *Mahirāvaner Pāla, Śiva-Rāmer Yuddha*, death of Tāraka—such war-themes indicating victory of the good against the evil forces are the main themes. This vigorous dance was one a war-dance among the primitive society. It still now retains the bold movement of steps and choses the particular theme to suit its own character.

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Another type of folk dance prevalent in the Midnapore district of West Bengal also has the *Rāmāyaṇa* as its background. The Santals of this region believe that they are the descendants of Rāvaṇa. On the Vijaya Daśamī day of the Durgāpūjā festival they still remember their defeat at the hand of Rāmacandra through a particular type of dance called *bhuang nāch*. The *Rāmāyaṇa* it appears, has gone deep into the distant aboriginal society also.

A more coherent narration is done in the 'Patua Sangit' of South Bengal. This is a very interesting example of the Bengali folk culture. There is a class of people who take as their profession painting the stories from the *Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas on the scroll. They go from door to door and describe by singing the incidents as they unroll the scroll. These songs are known as 'Patua-Sangit'. Both the painting and the song are interesting to the folklorists. We have instances of reproducing the life of Rāmacandra from his birth to his exile and other later events in these songs. The 'Sindhumani badh', 'Sītār Vanavāsa', 'the feats of Hanumān' make good subjects for the Patua-Sangit. The Kushangān of North Bengal as the name implies, is wholly based on the Rāma-legend. The word 'Kushan' comes from Kuśa, the name of Rāmacandra's son. As in practice everywhere a Gāyen continues to sing the pāla, *i.e.*, the episode with the accompaniment of a string instrument called 'byan'. In course of his musical narration two boys interefere with questions and the Gāyen also explains the episode by singing. The dohars sit around the Gāyen, follow the tune and repeat. Although the *Rāmāyaṇa*-episode is the main subject of the Kushan gān, topical and current subjects also serve as the interregnum. The *Kushan gān* has thus become a popular folk performance among the Rajbanshi community of Coochbehar in North Bengal.

The Rāma-episode is sung in various forms all over Bengal. The simple continuous narration in a monotonous tune is called *Pānchāli*—not in the sense the medieval narrative poems were called. These *pānchālis* take more intimate and unsophisticated form in the folk poetry. We get such pieces as on Bharata's devotion to his brother, Sītā's address to Hanumān in the Aśoka

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forest, sorrows of Sītā, abduction of Sītā and so on. Similarly, narration of Sītā's grief in different seasons is found particularly in East Bengal much in the fashion of the women characters in medieval narrative poems called Maṅgal Kāvyas, where it is known as Bāramāsya-Sītā's Bāramāsya shows how the classic conception was yielding to the folk taste. But they are rich in sincerity though not in craftmanship of composition. The common folks of Bengal have traditionally identified themselves with the simple human sentiment revealed in the Rāma-Sītā episode. The high ideal of severe austerity or its religious significance remain distant to them but the tender pathos, the domestic virtues touch a Bengali heart more easily. The *Rāmāyaṇa* in folklore assumes a different significance, which we miss in the *Mahābhārata*-episodes. And so though songs on Rāma-Sītā legend is scanty in comparison with those on Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Hara-Gaurī, the influence of the classic story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has penetrated deep into our life and culture.[9]

[9] For *Krittivāsa Rāmāyaṇa*, I have consulted the Pravasi edition (1353 B.S.), edited by Ramananda Chatterji.

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RĀMA-LITERATURE IN ORISSA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON INDONESIA

By K. C. SAHOO

The first work on the Rāma-story which proved to be of tremendous importance to the whole of Indian literature is the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. Most of the scholars of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* place the original work tentatively in the third century B.C.[1]

Historical Background of the Rāma-story in Orissa

At least from the 1st century A.D., Rāma was considered an incarnation of Viṣṇu, descended on earth in human form to establish a reign of righteousness in the world. This raised the text to the status of a sacred scripture. In the medieval times, Rāma became the object of a Bhakti-cult which considered him as the incarnation of the Supreme Brahman. Prof. Jacobi says that the legend of Rāma originated somewhere in the vicinities of Koshala and then became diffused in the provinces of eastern Hindustan[2], but it is not known exeactly when it reached the territories of Orissa, which was known by different names such as Kaliṅga, Kongada, Koshala, Uḍra and Utkala in different periods of history. Orissa, because of her sharply defined natural boundary, retained her autonomy both politically and culturally to a very late period. Dr. N. Sahu points out : "The Pitṛbhaktas and the Māṭharas were probably the first ruling dynasty of Kaliṅga who professed Brahmanism. The impact of the Gupta Culture on Kaliṅga seems to be responsible for making Brahmanism the state religion."[3] Though it can be conjectured that the *Rāma-Kathā* which had become popular by this time,

[1] A. R. Keith, 'The Age of the Rāmāyaṇa', *J.R.A.S.* (1915), pp. 318-28. M. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature,* Part I. (p. 516) and Rev. C. Bulcke, *Rāma-Kathā*, p. 34.

[2] H. Jacobi, *Das Rāmāyaṇa* (Translated by S.N. Ghosal), *J.O.I.*, Vol. VI, No. 4, p. 212.

[3] N.K. Sahu, *Buddhism in Orissa*, p. 78.

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must have reached Orissa with the spread of Brahmanism, we do not find any trace of it till the seventh century A.D. In a passage of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* which is suspected to be an interpolation there is a reference to Kaliṅga; but from this we cannot conclude anything about the popularisation of the legend of Rāma in Orissa. Some scenes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* appear for the first time on the walls of Paraśurāmeśwar temple at Bhubaneswar, which was erected in about the 7th century A.D.[4] From the descriptions of Yuan Chuang, who visited the country in the first half of the 7th century A.D., it appears that Orissa or Kaliṅga was divided into three distinct parts : U-ch'a (Odra), Kong-yo-t'o (Kongoda or Kungada) and Ki-ling-Kia (Kaliṅga). The country began in the northern part of the Midnapur district in the north and extended to the Ganjam and Vizagapatam districts in the south. Yuan Chuang, in his brief description of the people, refers to the condition of Hindu religion at that time. According to him there were more than two hundred and fifty Hindu temples and adherents of different sects were numerous.[5] Comparing the condition of Hinduism with that of Buddhism it can be concluded that Buddhism was popular in Udra whereas the Hindu religion was popular in Kongada and Kaliṅga. Though the great traveller refers to different sects of Hinduism, he does not mention any sect specifically.

The other source which can give us some information about the popularisation of the Rāma-legend in Orissa is the names of kings hitherto discovered. According to the custom of the Hindu society, a child is named after a deity of the Vedic pantheon, *e.g.*, Indra, Soma Varuṇa, Mitra, Prajāpati or a Purāṇic deity, *e.g.*, Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Śaṅkara, Gaṇeśa etc.[6] The frequent occurrences of such names in society indicate the popularity of such gods. We do not find any king of ancient Orissa prior to the 12th century A.D. who had named himself after Rāma or his other names. The first king who bears the name of Rāma was Rāghava[7], a son of Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga. He reigned

[4] K. C. Panigrahi, *Archaeological Remains at Bhubaneswar,* p. 29

[5] R. D. Banerjee, *History of Orissa,* pp. 136-145.

[6] *Hindu Samskaras* (A Socio-religious study of the Hindu Sacraments) by Rai Bali Pandey, M.A., D. Litt., Banaras, 1949.

[7] R. D. Banerjee, *Ibid.,* p. 252.

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in the country from 1156 A.D. to 1170 A.D.[8] The most interesting point of information, which comes to us is that Indirādevī, the mother of Rāghava, was a princess of the Ravikula or the Sūryavaṁśa.[9] The next historical name is Sītā Devī[10], a queen of Narasiṁha (I), She named her son as Bhānudeva (I), after the Sun. The son of Bhānudeva (I) was Narasiṅgha (II), who came in contact with Narahari Tīrtha, a great Vaiṣṇava teacher. R. D. Banerjee gives the following details of Narahari Tīrtha based upon *Narahari-yati Stotra.*[11] Narasingha (II) was an infant when his father died and the famous Vaiṣṇava scholar Narahari Tīrtha is said to have ruled as his regent for twelve years. Narahari was a disciple of the famous Ānandatīrtha, the founder of the Dwaita or Madhva School of Philosophy. His Guru said : "You must go to the country of Kaliṅga and obtain for me the images of Rāma and Sītā which I want to worship." Narahari obtained the images and took them to his Guru who worshipped them for eighty days and then made them over to his disciple, Padmanābha Tīrtha, who gave them back to Narahari Tīrtha, after six years. Narahari Tīrtha was the regent of Narasingha (II), for 12 years from 1278 A.D. to 1290 A.D. During these years he erected temples, and made grants to them. He must have propagated the Vaiṣṇava religion in the Kaliṅga country. The above account of the images of Rāma and Sītā makes it clear that the images were somehow famous and were known to such Vaiṣṇava saints as Madhva. We do not know when and by whom those images were brought to Orissa. It can be remembered here that Indirā Devī, a queen of Ananta Varma, was a princess of the Solar race. It was perhaps Indirā Devī who became a devotee of Rāma and Sītā and brought the Rāma-images with her. She named her son after her favourite deity. The other historial names after Rāma, which come down to us are, Gharadamaji Śrī Rāma Senāpati who had granted some donations in Śaka 1243 on the 13th day of the bright half of Śrāvaṇa, a Thursday, (6th August 1321 A.D.) and Sītādevī, a daughter of Narasimha (III) through his Queen, Kommidevamma. From the above statements, it is evidently clear that the names of Rāma and Sītā

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 254. [9] *Ibid.*, p. 254. [10] *Ibid.*, p. 270.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 271. See *Stotra-mahodadhi*, Nirnaya Sagara Press, Bombay, 1897, Part I.

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had become popular among the eastern Gangas and they were responsible for the popularisation of the Rāma-legend in Kaliṅga.

Hiralal suggests[12] that the districts of Sambalpur, together with the ex-state areas of Patna, Sonepur, Barma, and Rairakhol formed a part of the South Kosala in the 9th century A.D.[13] Even to the present day the Brahman priests, while performing sacrifices, mention the tract of Sambalpur as a part of the Dakshiṇa Kosala.[14] The Somavamśī Kings always mentioned the country as Kosala. Mahābhāva Gupta Yayāti I, who reigned in the beginning of the 10th century A.D. and Mahāśiva Gupta Yayāti, who ascended the throne in the middle of the 10th century A.D., mention Rāmachandra or Rāmabhadra in their Vakratentuli charter (Third plate, Line No. 33) and Nibinna charter (Second plate, second side, line No. 41) respectively.[15]

In a copper plate grant of the time of one Kumar Someśwara Deva of Sonepur, (12th century A.D.), it is said that the state of Sonepur bearing the name of *Paścima Laṅkā* as "Prasādikṛta", *i.e.*, granted to Abhimanyu by the Udyota Kesari of the line of Mahābhāva Gupta." In the Campamalla copper plate of Jogeśwara Deva Varman (14th century A.D.), it is stated that his palace was on the bank of the Mahānadī close to the rock called *Lankeśvarī* or *Laṅkāvaeṭṭaka*.[16] K. N. Mahapatra refers to a Sanskrit poet, Nārāyaṇa Śatakavi as the author of a work called *Rāmabhyudaya Kāvyam* (11th century A.D.).[17]

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[12] 'The extent and capital of Dakshina Kosala', *I.A.*, LXII, pp. 161-68 ff.

[13] From the descriptions of Yuan Chuang, it is clear that he took Chhattisgach and Bastar for Kosala, Mahakosala and southern Kosala, which was quite distinct from Oḍra, Kongada and Kaliṅga.

[14] B. C. Mazumdar, *Sonpur in the Sambalpur tract,* 1911, p. 9.

[15] *Ibid.,* p. 92, Appendix I.

[16] B.C. Mazumdar, *Sonpur in the Sambalpur tract*, chapter V, Mr. Mazumdar observes that Lankeśwarī is worshipped by the boatman when passing through the river. Similar to this Lankeśwarī hill bearing inscriptions, there is a boulder with inscriptions and footprints in the river near Sambalpur, and this latter is called the *Rāma-pada* rock. "The Cholian Rulers of Sonpur (1925)". See also Damodar Misra, *Swaranapur Guṇādarśa,* 1921, pp. 10-21.

[17] *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts of Orissa*, Vol. II, p. IX.

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From the above statements and names it is clear that the territories of Sambalpur, Sonepur, Bamada, Rairakhola, and Patna were once a stronghold of the adherents of the Rāma-cult. Even in the present century we find some castes claiming themselves to be the followers of Śrī Rāma or at least trying to establish their relation with Śrī Rāma. The first among such castes are the Raghunāthia Brahmins of Sambalpur. They are taken to be convert from the local tribes who were given the rank of Brahmans by the eponymous hero-god Rāmacandra when he was wandering in these forests.[18] The second group is the chief cultivating class numbering 30,161 in 1901 A.D.[19] They are called 'Kulta' or 'Kolita'. They are found in Sonepur, Bamada, Bauda, Rairakhola, Patna and Kalahandi. According to traditions recorded by R.D. Banerjee, they immigrated from the state of Baudha and their ancestors were water-carriers in the household of Rāmacandra. They had settled in Baudh during their wandering with Rāma in the Oriya country.[20] According to another legend, Rāma while wandering through the forests of sambalpur, met three brothers and asked them for water. The first brought water in a clear brass pot and was called Sudha (good-mannered). The second made a cup of leaves and drew water from a well with a rope; he was called Dumal from dori-mal, a coil of rope. The third brought water in a hollow gourd and he was named Koltha from ku-rita (ill-mannered). They worshipped the goddess Rāma-chaṇḍī, whose principle shrine is at Sarasara in the state of Baudh.[21] The Kaltuyas of Bonai are quite different from those of Sambalpur. They have markedly Aryan featues, with hazel or grey eyes. Rāmacandra, the seventh avatāra of Viṣṇu, is their favourite deity. The Bonai Kaltuyas call themselves Rāmānandis, followers of the teacher Rāmānanda of the 13th century A.D. The elders of the caste say that they had immigrated from Mithilā, which they left in days of Rāma and settled in Sambalpur, six generations before.

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[18] L.E.B. Cobden-Rāmsay, *Bengal Gazetteer, Feudatory States of Orissa.* 1959 (Howraw), p. 62.

[19] R. D. Banerjee, *History of Orissa,* p. 24.

[20] L.E.P. Cobden, Ramsay, *I.B.I.D.*, p. 62.

[21] L.E.B. Cobden, Ramsay, *I.B.I.D.*, pp. 146-47.

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The above account shows that the Rāma-cult gained wide popularity by the 12th century A.D. in the Kosala region of the State. In Orissa proper, Rāma was identified with Jagannātha. Poets like Balarāma Dās, Arjuna Dās and others have invariably mentioned that both the gods are one and the same. In Cuttack there is a Jagannātha temple which goes by the name of Raghunātha temple. In Purī a ceremony called the Raghunātha-vesha of Lord Jagannātha is observed. It was introduced in the 18th century by a Bengali Zamindar Bahadur Singh of Murshidabad.[22] It was abandoned later due to heavy rush of pilgrims.[23]

It has been stressed by M. M. Chakravarti that the existence of the Jagannātha-cult and the popularity gained by the Kṛṣṇa-cult in the 16th century A.D. did not prove favourable to the spread of the Rāma-cult in Orissa.[24] Nevertheless, it gave impetus to a vast amount of Rāma-literature in Oriya which in volume and artistic merit is in no way second to the existing Kṛṣṇa-literature in the language. We may trace the development of this Rāma-story in Orissa and assess its importance in various ways.

The Oriya Rāma-poets can broadly be divided into two groups. The first group of poets closely follows the episodes of Vālmīki, whereas the second group differs widely from him. The first group can further be divided into two sub-groups; the one led by Balarāma Dās, the author of *Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa* (16th century) and the other led by Viswanāth Khuntia, the author of *Vichitra Rāmāyaṇa*. Balarāma Dās and his followers follow the Bengal recension of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* whereas Viswanāth Khuntia and his followers follow the southern recension. The second group of poets consists of Sarala Dās, Arjun Dās, Siddheśwar Dās, Baranidhi Dās, Viswambhara Dās and Bhuiyam Mādhava Dās.

The striking feature of all their Rāmāyaṇas is the deviations from Vālmīki and introduction of new episodes.

Sarala Dās, the first poet of the Oriya *Rāmāyaṇa*, makes himself prominent by introducing new episodes of the Rāma-

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22 Jagabandhu Singh, *Prāchīna Utkal*, p. 484.

23 Pandit Narasingh Mohapātra, *Purī Bada Deula*, p. 27.

24 "Notes, on the Language and Literature of Orissa", J.O A. S.B Vol LXVII (1898), p. 351.

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Kathā unknown in Vālmīki, into his great epic—*Mahābhārata*. As the writer of *Mahābhārata*, it was expected of him to have the sanskrit *Mahābhārata* as his main source. But the analysis of the Rāma-episodes in his *Mahābhārata*, make it clear that he has not followed the Sanskrit original. The Rāma-episodes in his *Mahābhārata*, have a striking similarity to the *Bhaṭṭikāvya*, the *Paumachariu* of Swayambhū, the *Nrisimha Purāṇa*, and the *Mahā-nāṭaka*. It is not known whether Sarala Dās read all these works or listened to the stories from the people around him. As the teatment of the episodes presented by him do not bear any close resemblance with the works mentioned above, it can safely be said that he took them from others and reproduced them with the touch of his own imaginative and creative genius inspired by the goddess Durgā.

The newness of the stories of the *Sarala Mahābhārata* and their popularity with the masses inspired the later poets to incorporate in their works new stories from various sources. Balarāma Dās, the second poet in succession, but the first great poet of the Oriya *Rāmāyaṇas,* made the Bengal recension of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* the basis of his *Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa.* But the Bengal recension was not his only source. He utilized the other recensions as well. Besides the various recensions of Vālmīki, the influence on him of works like the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa,* the *Mahānāṭaka,* the *Padma Purāṇa,* the *Agni Purāṇa,* the *Raghuvaṁśa*, the *Mahābhārata* and many others cannot be ignored. He was aware of the spirit of his listeners. He tried to be one among them. The most striking feature of this Rāmāyaṇa lies not in the newness of the stories incorporated but in the changes brought in the atmosphere of the story. His Rāma and other characters no longer represent the age of Vālmīki. Rāma represents more a Vaiṣṇava of the 16th century than a banished prince of Vālmīki. Balarāma Dās has successfully turned the trio Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā into the trio, Jagannātha, Balabhadra and Subhadrā. The activities of Rāma have been identified with the festivals of Jagannātha. The poet changes the route taken by the banished Rāma and brings him to Orisssa for visiting the sacred places of the region. The complete Oriyanisation of the material in the *Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa* makes it a gallery of the pictures of the 16th century Oriya society, both Aryan and tribal.

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Arjun Dās, the writer of *Rāmavibhā* is influenced both by Sarala Dās and Balarāma Dās, but he changes the Purāṇic form of the story to that of a *Kāvya*. Instead of describing the complete Rāma-story, he takes the Ādi Kāṇḍa only. He changes the atmosphere of the meeting of Rāma and Paraśurāma and introduces a wordy-duel on the basis of the *Prasanna Rāghava* of Jayadeva.

In order to popularise the Rāma-story and also make it easily accessible to the masses, Maheshwar Dās, the writer of the *Ṭīkā Rāmāyaṇa*, reduced the bulky *Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa* to a shorter poem. Though he followed the *Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa* the story of Rāma's thirst[25] makes him distinct among the writers of the Oriya *Rāmāyaṇas*. Nilāmbara Dās added some more stories; the picture of Rāvaṇa drawn by Sītā, the story of the washerman and also the fight of Lava and Kuśa with Rāma and his brothers. Dhanañjaya Bhañja added the pre-marital love of Rāma and Sītā. Upendra Bhañja incorporated the serpent story.[26] Bhuiya Mādhava Dās, added some new elements to the birth-story of Rāma and his chieftains.

The additions made by the Oriya writers not only follow the dramas, the epics and the Purāṇas of Sanskrit literature, but also the folk tales prevalent among the masses.

The other interesting feature of Rāma-literature in Orissa is that it has a striking similarity with the Rāma-literature of Indonesia. It is not known when the Indians entered the land of Indonesia.The earliest reference to Indonesia in Indian literature

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[25] While wandering in the forest, Rāma felt thirsty and sent Lakṣmaṇa to find some water. While bringing water in a leaf, a kite destroyed the leaf thrice. Lakṣmaṇa got infuriated, struck the kite with an arrow and brought it along with the water to Rāma. Being asked by Rāma, the bird told that Sugrīva has been imprisoned by Vāli under a stone and the saliva was flowing with the stream, for which he has destroyed the leaf. Rāma was pleased and touched it with hand leaving a conch-mark for all future ages. This account is found in the *Ṭīkā-Rāmāyaṇa* by Maheśwara Dāsa (17th century A.D.).

[26] Upendra Bhañja (B.V. 28, 28-35) has written that after Vāli was born, Brahmā felt that the universe may not be able to bear the burden. To balance the weight, half the strength of Vāli was distributed to seven trees, which were surrounded by a Nāga. Rāma by pressing the snake with a foot, charged the arrow, which returned to the quiver, after piercing the trees.

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is found in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa,* where Sugrīva gives to his messengers a description of the different places in the world. The message runs as follows :

Ratnavantam Yavadvīpam Saptarājyopaśobhitam ।
Suvarṇarūpyakadvīpam suvarṇākaramaṇḍitam ॥
Yavadvīpamatikramya śiśiro nāma parvataḥ ।
divam spṛśati śṛṅgeṇa devadānava-sevitaḥ. ॥

—*Rām.* Iv.30, vv. 30-1.

From the passage cited above, it can be said that the contact between India and Indonesia began at least some centuries before the Christian era and continued for a long time. It cannot be denied that there was a long-standing contact between the two countries as names like Ussa (Oḍra) for Pegu, and Śrīkshetra (Purī) for ancient Prome in Burma, speak of the past relation between Orissa and Burma. Again the names like Ho-ling, Kling and Talsing find an echo in Kaliṅga and Trikaliṅga. From all these names it can be said that Kaliṅga which extended from the coastal region between the Mahānadī and the Godāvarī, played a prominent part in the expansion of Hindu culture in the East-Asian lands. The dynasties like the Śailendras, the Colas and the Gaṅgas, which were ruling Kaliṅga, had maritime relations with these Islands. The Orissan architecture influenced the Hindu images of Burma and Java.

It is unfortunate that the Oriya literature available at present begins from 15th century A.D., i.e., after a gap of 300 years of actual contact of Orissa with the East Indies. So the accounts available in Oriya literature are not historical accounts; they are mostly based on legends prevalent at that time in Orissa. However, it is interesting to note that even after 300 years, folk-memory reserved so many stories which speak of our past relations with the East Indies.

In the course of narrating the birth story of Vāli and Sugrīva, Sarala Dās says that their names were *Śyāmatila* and *Yavatila*, and as Añjanā was meditating on *Yavakoṭi,* Śyāmatila and Yavatila were thrown into the ocean and they were turned to monkeys. A similar story is available in *Seri Rāma.* All these names and the availability of the story in Orissa and Yava prove

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that the names Yavatila and Śyāmatila, refer to Yava and Siam. Yavakoṭi has been identified with the eastern corner of Java.

There are some more similarities present in the *Rāmāyaṇas* of both the countries.

The picture of Rāvaṇa drawn by Sītā, the killing of Śūrpaṇakhā's son by Lakṣmaṇa, the second mission of Hanumān, the Māyā-head, the quarrel between Hanumān and Nala, the story of the thirst of Rāma, the story of birds, the *Putreṣṭi Yajña* by Daśaratha, and the cheating of Viśvāmitra by Daśaratha may serve as examples.

As mentioned above, folklore played an important role in the *Rāma-Kathā* of Orissa. Though folklore consists of several divisions, such as folktale, legend, myth, riddle, etc., it is mostly myth which figures here. Every legend has a mythical facet and in the existing form *Rāma-Kathā* is more a legend than factual history. No wonder, poets came to expand the mythical aspect and incorporated new mythical stories into it. The stories of *Rāvaṇa Chhatra*[27], the crane[28], the *Cakravāka*[29], the

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[27] Balrāmadāsa (J.R. VI, pp. 37-39) has given an account of the Royal Umbrella of Rāvaṇa. He once, ascended the Puṣpaka Chariot, surrounded by one lakh servants holding umbrellas, one lakh maidens fanning him, to survey the army of Rāma. One lakh conches were also blown. The chariot was proceeding at a height of one thousand Yojanas. Rāvaṇa praised on one hand Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa for their valour; but was furious with Vibhīṣaṇa. He aimed a mace at Vibhīṣaṇa to kill him, but Hanumān took a mighty leap and came down with the mace. Rāma discharged an arrow on the umbrellas which fell down on mountains, oceans and earth and caused the mushrooms of the forest. Thenceforth, they are known as 'Rāvaṇa Chhattra'.

[28] Balarāmadāsa (J.R. IV, pp. 59-60) has narrated that while staying at Mālyavant, Rāma met a crane. He enquired about the reason for Rāma's sorrow, when Rāma is the creator. Knowing the details from Rāma, the bird informed Rāma that Rāvaṇa had taken away Sītā on Puṣpaka, Sītā was crying and loudly calling the name of Rāma : Rāma was pleased with him and on the bird's wishes, offered a boon to him that he would get food in rainy seasons without any effort.

[29] While searching for Sītā, Rāma met the bird at Pampā, at the time of their love sports. Rāma asked them about Sītā. The male bird not only refused to answer, but also blamed Rāma for disturbing them while making love. The words of the bird, infuriated Lakṣmaṇa, who inflicted a curse that they won't be united. After realising the mistake, Rāma, being compassionate said that they would be united only in the daytime.

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Cock[30], the milkman[31], the Śabara[32], which do not occur in Sanskrit are popular myths of Orissa. Most of them are etiological stories, as they try to explain away or advance logic for certain incidents. The impress of folklore can be traced in another way as well. It consists of the use of folk imagination. The very characteristic of folk imagination is exaggeration. It has a basic similarity with the psychology of rumour. As rumour goes inflating an event, folk imagination goes on exaggerating a

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30 According to Balarāmadāsa (J.R. IV, p. 77), when Rāma was searching for Sītā at Mālyavant mountain a cock enquired about the sorrow of Rāma and informed about Rāvaṇa's taking Sītā with him. Rāma narrated also his helplessness. The bird advised him to prepare for the war with Rāvaṇa. At this Rāma blessed him to have the red coloured crown (Sapta Sākhā Mukuṭa). After Rāma left the place, the cock realised that he should have asked for immortality; and since then it is searching for Rāma and calling his name.

31 This is a popular story. The story described by Balarāmadāsa is as follows : (J. R. III, pp. 56-59).

One day Rāma, while searching for Sītā, felt hungry and came near the cowherds. Both of them wanted some milk in exchange of a ring but the cowherds refused to their request. As they insulted Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa being infuriated, cursed them that the milk of their cows would turn to blood. The Milkmen realised their fault, and begged pardon, so Rāma relented and removed the curse. But they will have to suffer in Kaliyuga for their misconduct. A milkman Prabhākar by name, gave milk but did not take any thing in return. Rāma promised him to be his son as Kṛṣṇa and Lakṣmaṇa as Saṁkarṣaṣa. The milkman and his wife will become Nanda and Yaśodā in Dvāpara.

This story has also been narrated by Saraladās and Upendrabhañja.

32 Balarāmadāsa (J.R. III, pp. 51-52), has narrated that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, met Śabara and his wife in the forest, being directed by Kabandha. On enquiry, Rāma gave a short sketch of his country, family and himself. Śabarī took them to her cottage, washed their feet, and offered them a tiger-skin to sit. She offered the fruits to Rāma, which bore the mark of her teeth. At last, when she offered a mango, which had no such mark, Rāma did not accept it.

The mysterious part of the story is that Śabarī had known before that Rāma was to come there. Hence she collected those fruits and kept them after testing. She praised Rāma as 'Param Brahma' and 'Nārāyaṇa', and asked for Rāma's blessings. Having been advised by Rāma, she went to Ṛṣyamūka mountain and entered into heaven and was greeted by Indra.

Balarāmadāsa has also narrated a similar story in his work *Lakṣmī Purāṇa* (MSS. p. 13 *a*), where Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa lived in the house of Jara Sabara for ten years after they killed Rāvaṇa Here Jara Sabara offered him mangoes after testing them.

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story. The increase in the number of the Queens of Rāvaṇa and Daśaratha may serve as an example. The very genesis of the *Vilaṅkā Rāmāyaṇa, Vilaṅkā Khaṇḍa*[33] and the stories in *Sarala Mahābhārata* are examples of exaggeration and inflation.

The Oriya Rāma-literature is rich in quantity as well as in quality. Its quantitative richness is revealed in the number of works, small poems like the *Koilis*, the *Cautisas* and others, and long poems of the nature of the *Kāvyas* and *Purāṇas*. Besides folklore and the incantations bring out its popularity among the masses. From the point of view of quality, it is second to none of the other branches of medieval Oriya literature. It follows both the folk as well as the ancient literary traditions.

[33] *Vilaṅka Rāmāyaṇa* written by Siddheśvara Dāsa and *Vilaṅka Khaṇḍa* written by Varanidhi Dāsa, in 17th century, narrate almost the same story with minor differences. The theme of these books forms an interlude between the Laṅkā and the Uttarakāṇḍas. They are modelled on the Laṅkā-kāṇḍa of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, to describe the exploits of Rāma and Hanumān and their fight with the king of Vilaṅkā. Here Rāvaṇa has been described as having one thousand heads.

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THE RĀMĀYAṆA IN MANIPURI LITERATURE AND FOLK-LORE

By E. NILAKANTA SINGH

Śrī Aurobindo wrote about the Rāmāyaṇa thus :

"The *Rāmāyaṇa* embodied for the Indian imagination its highest and tenderest human ideals of character, made strength and courage and gentleness and purity and fidelity and self-sacrifice familiar to it in the suavest and most harmonious forms coloured so as to attract the emotion and the aesthetic sense, stripped morals of all repellent austerity on the one side or on the other of mere commonness and lent a certain high divineness to the ordinary thing of life, conjugal and filial and maternal and fraternal feelings, the duty of the prince and leader and the loyalty of follower and subject, the greatness of the great and the truth and worth of the simple, toning things ethical to the beauty of a more psychical meaning, by the glow of its ideal hues." (*The Foundation of Indian Culture,* Centenary Edition (page 290.)

This sums up the attitude of the Manipuri Hindus of Manipur and outside also to the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition since the 18th century A.D., when Rāmānandī cult of North India became a State religion during the reign of the great Manipuri King, Garibniwas (1709-1748). Bengal Vaishnavism which found supreme expression in the latter part of 18th century A.D. somehow integrated the Rāma-worship into the liberal outlook of a Hindu mind and even though the cult has been assimilated into the Vaishnavic way of life, the Rāmāyaṇa still retains its power and glory for the illiterate masses, the chief vehicles of communication are : Kathaks whom the Manipuris call *Wari Leebas* (Story-tellers), the interpreters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (called *Lairik Thiba Haibas*), the ministrels on the Pena (Stringed Manipuri musical instrument), the singers on the Dholok (called *Khongjaom Parba sakpas*), the Kīrtana musicians of the old Pāla (*Bangdesh Pala* as they call it) and the Jātrās based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* become intensely real, human and alive to the Manipuri mind. In a sense, an old

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illiterate Manipuri mind. In a sense, an old illiterate Manipuri lady in the village knows much more about the *Rāmāyaṇa* than the degree holders of the Universities and should I say, more cultured than most of the elites of Manipur. The old Manipuri scholars presented the *Rāmāyaṇa* in all its seven books under the inspiration of *Kṛttivāsī Rāmāyaṇa* (of Bengal) as early as 10th century A.D. The entire *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* has been translated recently and the tradition of presenting *Rāmāyaṇa*-stories on the modern stage and also in the Jātrā style still continues in full vigour.

Rāma-worship in Manipur

It is difficult to say precisely when Manipur (meaning the valley area of about 700 square miles) came within the fold of Hindusim. The identification of Manipur in the *Mahābhārata* with the present State of this name, which finds support from scholars like Dr. R. C. Mazumdar, became the pivot for linking up Manipur with Brahmanical Purāṇa tradition. Dr. S.K. Chatterjee is of the view that the Meitei people of Manipur were in the Hindu fold as early as 500 A.D. at least. The copper plate inscriptions of King Khongtekcha (799 A.D.) start with the word—*Śrī Hari* mentioning the existence of 363 gods, of whom Hari is the supreme. A Vishnu temple in the Bengal style of architecture was built in the 15th century during the reign of King Kiyamba.

But it is only in the early part of 18th century A.D. that Rāma-worship came to stay in Manipur. A great Manipuri King Garib Niwaz was initiated into Rāmānandī cult of Vaishṇavism in 1737 A.D. under the influence of a religious preacher named Śānti Dās Maharta from Sylhet (in present Bangladesh). Earlier, the King had became a convert to Bengal School of Vaishṇavism under his guru, Gopāl Dās. This Rāmānandī sect, associated with Rāmānanda (15th century A.D.) who preached 'Sītā Rāma' among all classes of people including Muslims (Kabir was a chief disciple), conceived Rāma and Sītā combined as the dual incarnation of Vishṇu. Vaishṇavism of the Rāmānandī cult became a State religion during the reign of King Garib Niwaz.

The king founded an image of Rāma along with the images of Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, Śatrughna and Sītā and began their worship. An image of Hanuman was also carved out of a big

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slab of stone and it was put in the brick temple at a place called Mahābalī. Thousands of devotees of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult still flock to this temple on special occasions, with the prayer for gaining strength to Hanumānjī. This Rāmānandī school could not, however, prosper with the death of Garib Niwaz and was finally replaced by Chaitanya's School of Vaishṇavism during the reign of Rājarshi Bhāgyachandra (1769-1798) when the renowned Rāsa-līlā was dedicated to Govindaji in 780 A.D.

Rāmāyaṇa in Old Manipuri Literature

A great Manipuri scholar named *Angom Gopi* who adorned the royal court of King Garib Niwaz (1709-1748) gave a comprehensive Manipuri version of *Rāmāyaṇa* with its seven books. Even though inspired by the *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* of the poet Kṛttivāsa (15th century A.D.), this work is not a translation, but an independent work, taking liberties with the original and adding much of the author's creative imagination. Of the seven volumes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* series, 3 volumes, viz., *Sundara Kāṇḍa, Laṅkā Kāṇḍa* and *Uttara Kāṇḍa* have come to light and the beautiful lines written in Manipuri script, as distinguished from the existing Assamese-Bengali script, make exquisite reading. Another great scholar, Lamango Sing Konthoujamba who adorned the court of Rajarshi Bhāgyachandra wrote a work, *Rām Nongaba* (the death of Rāma) dealing with the later section of *Uttara Kāṇḍa*. This poetry book ends with an invocation to Rāma Nārāyaṇa and a prayer for the prosperity of the great Manipuri King, Bhāgyachandra.

Manipuri Rāmāyaṇa : A comparative study

The seven volume *Manipuri Rāmāyaṇa* of Angom Gopi got its inspiration from the *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* of poet Kṛttivāsa. But poet Kṛttivāsa was very much a Bengali and conceived of his characters being coloured by the atmosphere of the Bengali society during his days. Vālmīki's Rāma was intensely human, having strong and weak points, even though an incarnation (Avatāra). Its characters are full-blooded and perfectly human and safely anchored in truth. When Lakṣmaṇa got news of the decision to exile Rāma, he got upset and went to the extent of possible expressed himself most vehemently against his father

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who had been entrapped by Kaikeyī. Rāma warned Sītā that she should not praise him in the presence of Bharata because those in power do not tolerate the praise of others. In the book entitled *Laṅkā Kāṇḍa*, when Sītā was forsaken by Rāma after the war, Sītā was terribly upset and she told Rāma that he spoke like some man on the street. These brave expressions scattered here and there in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* were simply inconceivable to the Bengali poet and in the name of chastity, brotherly loyalty and filial affection, poet Kṛttivāsa simply omitted these expressions, for which he was praised by some Bengali scholars. But it goes without saying that the epic dimension of the original *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki is much curtailed by these sophisticated niceties and values of a cultured middle class Bengali Society. Kṛttivāsa endowed Rāma with divine qualities to a considerable extent and did not make an attempt to follow strictly the original. He also integrated his work with various episodes from the Purāṇas. His *Rāmāyaṇa* became ultimately an altogether different regional version, very much Bengali and idealistic.

Even though it follows the pattern of the *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* the *Manipuri Rāmāyaṇa* attempts to make a straight story with much of poetic expression and imagination and omits many of the episodes which had little relevance in the context. For example in the *Uttara Kāṇḍa,* the Manipuri version omits many of the episodes like the quarrel between the vulture and owl, story of King Ila, etc., and goes straight to the story proper; and after the embrace of Sītā by Mother Earth, the poet becomes impatient and omits the lamentations of Lava and Kuśa, Rāma's anger against Earth, conquest of the Gandharvas and departure of Lakṣmaṇa; and it hastens the journey of Rāma to heaven. needless to say that condensation of the narration in such a way robs the version of something of the epic grandeur. The language used in this *Manipuri Rāmāyaṇa* is not chaste manipuri but a mixture of Bengali and old Manipuri expressions juxtaposed in a pleasant manner. It is a pity that this work could not get the popularity it deserves in the later part of 18th and 19th centuries on account of the overwhelming impact of Bengal Vaishnavism along with the Bhāgavata tradition on the Manipuri minds. It is during the two or three decades of the later part of 20th century that Manipuri scholars versed in Sanskrit and Bengali, started exploring the hidden treasures of

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old Manipuri heritage preserved on Manipuri paper and in Manipuri scripts.

Rāmāyaṇa in modern Manipuri literature

Modern Manipuri literature took its birth in the early part of 20th century A.D. in the hands of the Manipuri writers and scholars well versed in Bengali, Sanskrit and English. But it started almost from the very basic, having little to do with the old literary tradition. It was written in Assamese-Bengali script, as modern education was imparted in this script. But the vast heritage of old literature was preserved in Manipuri scripts. Vālmīki and Kṛttivāsa, besides other *Rāmāyaṇas* like *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* and *Adhyātma*, were again critically studied by the scholars and writers. Poet A. Minaketan wrote the drama, *Sītā Vanavās* (exile of Sītā) in the early thirties. Fragments of the *Rāmāyaṇa* like *Bharat Vilāp* (the Lamentation of Bharat), *Sītār Vanavās* and the Manipur version of the highly acclaimed Bengali play—*Sītā* (by Jogesh) were staged a number of times on the professional and amateaur stage. The entire *Rāmāyaṇa* has now been translated by a Manipuri Scholar, Shri L. Ibungoyaima Singh, and is now awaiting publication. *Uttararāmacarita* (of poet Bhavabhūti) has been translated and published. Another Manipuri poet and scholar, H. Nabadwipchandra Singh translated almost all the cantos of *Meghanādavadha Kāvya* (of Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutta) in the early thirties. This work characterised by humanistic consideration has now influenced other Manipuri versions of Shri L. Ibungoyaima Singh and N. Ibobi Singh. Poet A. Minaketan Singh also recreated the seventh canto in exquisite Manipuri. *Raghuvamśa* of poet Kālidāsa has been translated by two Sanskrit scholars, Pandit Ch. Kalachand Shastry and Pandit Brajabihari Sharma in two separate vesions. Condensed versions of the Rāmāyaṇa in Manipuri also appeared, meant particularly for young people. The prayer of every devout Vaishnava of Manipur with the words 'Hare Kṛṣṇa' and 'Hare Rāma' keeps the flame of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition still burning and it finds expression in various forms of modern Manipuri literature.

Rāmāyaṇa in Manipuri Durgā Pūjā

The nine-day festival called Durgā Pūjā (invocation of Devī) is celebrated by the Manipuris in a big scale under the royal

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patronage. The last day of the Pūjā known as Vijaya Daśamī (a counterpart of North Indian Dussehra) celebrates the victory of Rāma over Rāvaṇa. Based partly on the tāntric tradition of Bengal, poet Kṛttivāsa narrated how Rāma, under the advice of Brahmā, invoked the blessings of the Devī who allowed him to kill Rāvaṇa. The Manipuri King, as a representative of Rāma, goes to the battlefield, accompanied by his nobles and army on palanquins and horseback (the King rides the elephant) and all move in a procession. A ten-headed effigy of Rāvaṇa is shot by the arrows, replaced later by the gun shots from the Jawans of the King. Great festivities including sword and spear dances also form part of the festival. This day is also called *Kwak-Jātrā* (procession of crows) as the crows are tempted to collect in a certain area and the flight of a particular crow indicates the fortune of the land. Thousands of people from the far off places of the valley greet this grand march.

Rāmāyaṇa in old Sankīrtana tradition

During the reign of King Garib Niwaz, who was initiated into the Rāmānandī cult of Vaishṇavism, a group of Kīrtana musicians from Bengal was reported to have arrived in Manipur and they sang about Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Govinda. This group who found patronage in the royal temple represents the old tradition of Manipuri Saṅkīrtana (Bangdesh Pāla) and was attached to the royal palace in two sub-groups entitled *Sevak Pāla* and *Leipak Chaba Pāla* (believed to have stuck to this singing by eating earth during war) whose invocation starts always with 'Rāma Kṛṣṇa Govinda' to this day.

Rāmāyaṇa through the Kathaks

But the chief vehicle of communicating *Rāmāyaṇa*-message to the masses should be the extremely popular mass medium called Kathaks (known as *Wari Leebas* in Manipur) who narrate for days and nights with gusto, with remarkable erudition and creative imagination. Their basic text is *Kṛttivāsī Rāmāyaṇa* even though they liberally use various episodes from Vālmīki, *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* and Purāṇic episodes. A lot of humour is also injected into the theatrical narration and it makes an appeal to the old and the young alike. They also add much of their imagination and sometimes make the valley of Manipur a part

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of an area where the *Rāmāyaṇa*-story occurred. And such is the power of their hold over the mass mind that even the educated old people are constrained to exercise the "willing suspension of disbelief" over such incredible episodes. The *Wari Leebas* represents really a great tradition, mostly oral and some of the veterans specialise in the *Rāmāyaṇa* stoies, even though they deal with the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas also.

Rāmāyaṇa in the Pena music

The Manipuris have developed a style of narration-cum-singing with a stringed instrument called Pena (possibly a corruption of Vīṇā) which the old poets known as ministrels (called *Pena Shakpas* in Manipuri) present for more than a thousand nights. They generally take up a Manipuri epic—*Khamba Thoibi* supposed to be the incarnations of Lord Śiva and Devī along with other stories of six earlier incarnations located in the village of Moirang (once a principality) about 50 km from the capital. These Pena Shakpas also take up the *Rāmāyaṇa*-themes and with their remarkable control over the musical instrument and singing in the peculiar Manipuri tune, make the people weep over the fate of life-long sufferer Sītā and get inspiration from the moral values which the *Rāmāyaṇa* depicts through various characters. Life becomes more meaningful and beautiful after such a cleansing process in the hearts of the simple people. Here again, Rāma is divine and an incarnation of Viṣṇu while Sītā represents Lakṣmī and for the masses the listening to *Rāmāyaṇa*-singing constitutes an act of prayer and worship.

Rāmāyaṇa in the Khongjom Parva

The Manipuris have also another type of narration with the Dholok (a north Indian drum) which is partly narration and partly singing. A recent style developed after 1891 A.D. *Khongjom-Parva* is connected with the singing about the battle at Khongjom where the Manipuris had the last tragic fight against the British. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is also incorporated into this style of singing and there are now some distinguished ladies in this field who specialise in the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme.

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Rāmāyaṇa in the Lairk Thiba-Haiba

The tradition of singing (with Rāgas and Rāgiṇīs) the ślokas of a religious text, followed immediately by the interpretation by a scholar (known as *Lairk Thiba-Haiba* in Manipuri) began from the 18th century A.D. The *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* of poet Kṛttivāsa is the favourite text and the reciters sing the ślokas in *Payar chhanda*, indicating the various moods and the modes of singing. There is also an additional text called *Lakṣmaṇa Digvijaya* in Bengali, the recitation and interpretation of which is believed to impart good fortune to the listeners. This is another powerful mass medium to bring the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the people's hearts.

Rāmāyaṇa in the Jātrā tradition

Manipuri had also its share of Rāma Līlā tradition as a Jātrā form, even though it could not make much headway. About fifty years back, Rāma Līlā dealing mostly with the early portion of *Rāmāyaṇa* with a lot of magic and acrobatics in it, became a popular entertainment. A second Rāma Līlā group also came up a few years back. But it met with a tragic fate as the Hanumān with the tail dipped in petrol (Laṅkā Kāṇḍa) caught fire and got burnt to death in the very presence of the spectators who mistook his cries for real acting. The party got dissolved thereafter.

Conclusion

It is evident that the *Rāmāyaṇa* has really created an impact on the Manipuri minds through the ages. It is possible that the Manipur *Rāmāyaṇa* might have been popular in the 18th century A.D. during the reign of King Garib Niwaz. But its importance has been ecclipsed by the Bhāgavata tradition of Bengal school of Vaishṇavism. The considerable neglect of the Manipuri works written in Manipuri script during the later part of 18th century and 19th century is responsible to a degree for the comparative isolation of *Manipuri Rāmāyaṇa* from the mass mind. Moreover, the work remained in manuscript and has been printed and published only recently. But the comparative neglect of the *Manipuri Rāmāyaṇa* has been more than compensated by the various mass media through which *Rāmāyaṇa* has been

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brought nearer to the hearts of the people through the ages. The liberal outlook of a Hindu mind which can integrate Rāma-worship with the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult with the expression of *Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Rāma* is also responsible for the geat sensitivity on the part of the Manipuri Vaishṇavas to the ideals and message of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

It is, of course, true that the *Kṛttivāsī Rāmāyaṇa,* the basic text of these artistic expressions and even of the Manipuri *Rāmāyaṇa*, was nearer to the vigour of the soil and failed to attain the epic manner of Vālmīki. It was the narrative poetry of the age in the Puranic tradition. Unlike Kamban, the Tamil poet (9th century A.D.) who made a great original epic of *Rāmāyaṇa* and also unlike Tulsidas (16th century A.D.) whose famed *Rāmāyaṇa* combines with a singular mastery lyric intensity, romantic richness and the sublimity of the epic imagination, *Kṛttivāsī Rāmāyaṇa* and its Manipuri version only served to respond to the cultural necessity of transferring into popular speech the whole central story of *Rāmāyaṇa*.

It is perhaps time that we go back to the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* again : to judge it as a work of art, not as a Purāṇa or Bhakti text and to put also a few questions which still defy an answer. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is basically a book of poetry, an epic poem of huge dimension. It is one thing to assess the response of the masses to the poetry of Vālmīki through the ages. It is altogether a different thing to discover the real Vālmīki who was also improved upon—Vālmīki who created Rāma, the Man and not a god, who suffered, struggled and won the victory over Rāvaṇa, only to lose Sītā again. "You have the right to action and not to the fruits thereof" says the *Gītā*. Rāma, who was utterly lonely in his last moments, perhaps knew his own position and did behave in a completely detached manner, reminding one forcibly of the *Anāsakti Karmayoga* of the *Gītā*. A great Bengali scholar, Rājaśekhar Bosu was of the view that *Uttara Kāṇḍa* was possibly the creation of another poet. But it was very much Vālmīki without which the beauty of *Rāmāyaṇa* as a work of art would lose much of its epic dimension. There are also a few cantos in *Uttara Kāṇḍa* which almost looked like

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interpolations. Why did Rāvaṇa steal Sītā? A simple question and the answer is obvious : this is always the practice of the strong and immoral people having the world at their feet, an expression of the beastly qualities of man. But in the 13th canto of *Uttara Kāṇḍa*, Agastya tells Rāma that Rāvaṇa stole Sītā in order to realise Hari. It is difficult to believe in such a statement from Vālmīki, as it is very much the Kṛttivāsī concept of Rāvaṇa as a concealed devotee of Rāma. These are some of the questions which a revaluation of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* might possibly answer. Indeed Vālmīki has still relevance to the basic situation of the 20th century, as it had through the ages. The nature and quality of the questions may be different and so also the answers which might help in exploring further the meaning of life in the present context.

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THE RĀMĀYAṆA IN ASSAMESE LITERATURE

By **BISWANARAYAN SHASTRI**

Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* caught the imagination of the people—saints, kings, poets and the common people alike. The *Rāmāyaṇa* exercised an infleunce on the mind of the Indian people which has no parallel in the world. It is, therefore, quite obvious that a work which touches every human heart, gathers something in its journey through the ages, popular beliefs and episodes. In course of time it crossed the boundary of India and reached the Far East. Rāma was deified and regarded as the incarnation of Vishnu, perhaps at the beginning of the Christian era, and definiely before Kālidāsa. Since then, for the last two thousand years, Rāma has been worshipped as God and the Rāma-legend is depicted in arts of painting, sculpture and architecture. Gradually *Rāmāyaṇa* has taken the form of folklore and new episodes were interwoven. It is a common phenomenon that while oral tradition becomes literary tradition, the literary tradition also turns into an oral one.

Rāmāyaṇa-tradition in Assam

We are not sure when *Rāmakathā* entered into Assam and the *Rāmāyaṇa*-tradition became popular with the people of different ethnic groups. It is interesting to note that there is not a single temple, in tact or in ruins, in Assam dedicated to Rāma or Māruti, while a large number of temples all over India with the images of Rāma and Māruti are found. Temples of Māruti alone is also a common feature in Northern India but this too is conspicuous by its absence in Assam. In Assamese tradition and culture Hanumān is never regarded as divine. In the architecture the Rāma-legend was not engraved, as nothing of this is found in the ruins. Of course, in the *Rāmāyaṇa* manuscripts and the works on the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme, there are paintings of Rāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa etc.

In the copper-plate inscriptions, the earliest literary record of culture and tradition, discovered in Assam and dating back to

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early 7th century, the reference to Rāma are few, while references to Kṛṣṇa-legend are many.

It is in the middle of the fourteenth century that the great scholar and poet Mādhava Kandali undertook the task of translating the *Rāmāyaṇa* into Assamese verse. His patron was Mahāmāṇikya, a Varāhī king.[1] The royal patronage extended to the efforts to make the *Rāmakathā* popular with the common people reveals the prevalence of the *Rāmāyaṇa*-tradition in Assam long before the Assamese translation came into being. Mādhava Kandali's is the first translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* into a regional language of Northern India, perhaps next only to Kamban's Tamil version.

Mādhava Kandali, better known as Kavirāja (king of poets) Kandali, followed the original faithfully, though he avoided literal translation. He indicates the guideline of the rendering as follows :

> "For the knowledge of the people and at the request of the Varāhī king Sri Mahāmāṇikya, I have rendered the fine verses of the *Rāmāyaṇa* extracting the essence and leaving off the details, like the ghee procured by churning the milk. I have, of course, added some kāvyarasa at the instance of Mahāmāṇikya."

At another place he declares his principle in making Vālmīki's immortal work intelligible to the Assamese people : "I have avoided interpolations and taken only the substance." (Lambhā parihari sārodhṛte).

He says :

> "Vālmīki rachilā śāstra gadya-padya chande ।
> tāhāka vicāra āmi kariya prabandhe ॥
> āponāra buddhi artha jimata bujhilon ।
> saṁkhepa kariyā tāka pad viracilon ॥
> * * * *

[1] Varāhī means literally the descendant of Varāha, the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu. Naraka, the adopted son of Janaka of Mithilā has been described in the *Kālikāpurāṇa* and other Purāṇas as the son of the Mother Earth by Viṣṇu in His boar incarnation. Bhāskara Varmā, the famous king of Kāmarūpa of 7th century, traces his genealogy to Naraka, the son of Varāha Viṣṇu.

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Kavisava nibandhay loka vyavahāre ।
Kato nija kato lambhā kathā anusāre ॥
daivavāṇī nuhi ito loukakahe kathā ।
eteka ihāra doṣa nalaiva sarvathā ॥"

(The poet Vālmīki composed *Rāmāyaṇa* in prose and rhythmic verse. After a painstaking study of it, I have rendered it into Assamese verse, as I could grasp the meaning, in a condensed form ..... The poets compose according to popular convention, while some of the subject-matteer is original, some others are superimposed..... This is not from the mouth of God (*Vedas*) but only a popular story. Therefore, you should, by no means, try to find fault in my rendering (*i.e.* in my abridgement and addition).

Following this dictum, Mādhava Kandali, without introducing new stories or episodes has added something of purely descriptive nature derived from the local manners and customs; for this he has advanced the argument that it is not the words from God, meaning the *Vedas*, but a narrative of a human being and hence condensation of the matter and addition of literary embellishment are to be accepted with grace. Following the original, most probably the version which was prevalent in Eastern India at his time, Mādhava Kandali has woven popular elements into its artistic web, drawn from his contemporary society. Local customs, manners and habits have been added to make it more intimate to the people. But Kandali has never allowed sectarian views or religious sentiment to override his artistic way or expression. Even for the sake of literary beauty the original was not mutilated. He blended the literary beauty with popular taste and added new flavour to it. He fashioned his cities and persons as he visualised them on the background of his time.

He describes how, on the eve of Rāma's coronation, the city of Ayodhyā looked like :

"Hāso hāso kare puri Ayodhyā samprati ।
Nṛtya gīta-vādya jena dekhi Amrāvatī ॥"

(The city of Ayodhyā looks as if smiling. It looks like the city of Amarāvatī with dance, songs and sounds of musical instruments.)

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In describing physical charm, the poet, though he followed the poetic convention, had something of his own :

"Hara-kopa bahni-porhe khuji napāi jur ।
Nābhi sarovare Kāmdeve dilā bur ॥
Nijapura paśi Kāme mudāilā duār ।
Udarara loma pānti dhūma bhaila tār ॥"

(Cupid having been burnt by the fire of wrath of Hara, finding no place of solace elsewhere, had a dip into the lake, that is, Sītā's navel. Having entered into his own city, Cupid shut the door; and the smoke (as the result of immersion) appeared in the shape of hair in her abdomen.)

On hearing the proposal of Rāma for going on exile, Sītā entreats him to abandon the idea:

"Campaka kalikā jena mora kelevara ।
Luṇḍi ghuṇḍi āchilāhā jehena bhramara ॥
Jave āsi vikaśita bhailā phula phala ।
Upabhoga eri kenakarāha niṣphala ॥"

(Hitherto my body had been like a Campaka bud, and you had been hovering around me like a black bee. Now, when it is radiant with blossoms and bearing fruit, why are you going to give up enjoyment and make my life meaningless?)

His dictum may be summed up :

"Though deep yet clear : though gentle yet not dull
Strong without rage; without overflowing, full."

O course, in his treatment there seems to be a generic transformation. The heroic tone of the original has been modified to such an extent that in the place of heroism we find the overtones of an ideal family life, extolling virtues like devotion, steadfastness, chastity and loyalty.

Unlike Tulasīdāsa and Kṛttivāsa, Kandali has not imposed Supreme divinity on Rāma. For instance, Kṛttivāsa describes Rāma with four hands when he was born. Except one or two minor things added here and there, Kandali has not taken anything from the Purāṇas. For instance, harassment of Sītā by a crow and the killing of the crow by Rāma with *aiṣikāstra* (an

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arrow made of reed) is an incident described in the *Agnipurāṇa* and it finds place in the *Assamese Rāmāyaṇa*.[2]

For the popular taste, i.e. for the common men, certain descriptions seem to be added. The carnel desire expressed by Kunjī, the hunchback ugly old woman for Bharata when he returned to Ayodhya from his maternal uncle's home might be cited in this regard.

When that hunchback maid heard that prince Bharata was returning to Ayodhyā from his maternal uncle's palace, she being charged with emotion, wanted to offer her love. She put on thirty items of jewellery, applied perfumes and made a dash to meet Bharata. While proceeding she was musing within herself : "I am older than Bharata, but what does it matter? Does age ever stand in the way of lovers? It is not unlikely that Bharata may feel shy to accept me as mistress openly. However, I shall be his mistress in secret."

There is nothing in the original to warrant such a scene. Of course, Kaikeyī praiseḍ Kunji and sought her advice.[3]

Kunji's adventure has been introduced as a digression to the audience who are overwhelmed with grief by hearing a series of sad incidents—exile of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, death of Daśaratha etc.

The apparently near vulgar description turns into a humorous one, when Kunjī, who was in seventh heaven in anticipation of enjoyument, was caught hold of by the hair by Śatrughna and given severe beating.

It is believed that Mādhava Kandali rendered the entire seven kāṇḍas of the *Rāmāyaṇa* into Assamese verse, but unfortunately only five kāṇḍas are available, the Ādikāṇḍa and the Uttarakāṇḍas having been lost. It may be that Kandali did not consider these two Kāṇḍas as original and, therefore, left them out in his translation. Later on, after more than a hundred years, the great Vaiṣṇava saint Śaṅkaradeva added the Uttarakāṇḍa and his disciple Mādhavadeva the Ādikāṇḍa. It is

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2 This is found in the Gaudīya version of the Rāmāyaṇa also.

3 "Jaghanamte sunirmāmsam rasanā-dāma-sannibham |
..... vilagnañca stanadvayam ||"

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also doubtful whether these two Kāṇḍas are really from the pen of these two great saints.

The detailed description of the Ahalyā-Indra episode is found in the Ādikāṇḍa of the *Assamese Rāmāyaṇa*. It says that the sage Gautama had been practising severe penance which frightened Indra. Indra wanted to distract him from penance and asked his fellow gods to do this. None dared to face Gautama. At last Indra himself went to the hermitage of Gautama and there beholding the beauty of Ahalyā fell a victim of her charms.

"Gautamara tapobhanga ekhane āchoka ।
Ahalyāra rūpe āti mohileka moka ॥"

(Let the distraction of Gautama be postponed for the time being. I am now completely under the spell of her charms.)

This shows that Indra has no prior plan to seduce Ahalyā. Ahaylā on the other hand, as the description goes, could recognise him only after she was seduced. But she took pity on Indra and asked him to flee from the place. Gautama appeared on the scene and cursed both Indra and Ahalyā. Immediately, the testicles of Indra fell down and the symbol of the female sex appeared all over his body.

Indra left the place and remained hidden in the midst of a lotus in the North. Śacī not finding her husband Indra, approached Bṛhaspati who advised her to worship the Goddess Durgā. She did accordingly and the Goddess directed her to the place where Indra was hiding. She went there with Bṛhaspati and found Indra. Indra, as advised by Bṛhaspati, worshipped the Goddess Durgā who granted him the boon that the ugly symbols on his body would become a thousand eyes.

In the versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Ahalyā is seen not an innocent victim of the evil design of Indra, but a willing co-operator.[4]

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[4] "Muniveṣam sahasrākṣam *vijñāya* (jñātvāpi) Raghunandana । Matim cakāra durmedhā devarāja-kutūhalāt ॥" "Kṛtārthāsmi suraśreṣṭha..."

Rāmānuja explains the expression "devarājakutūhalāt" as "sa mām abhilaṣatīti kautukāt, divyarati-kautukācca." Vātsyāyana quotes Goṇikāputra saying "yam kaṁcid ujjvalam puruṣam dṛṣṭvā strī kām ayate." In this context he mentions Ahalyā as a woman who has had a paramour.

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In the Assamese version however Ahalyā is depicted as an innocent victim but she developed a liking for Indra after she was seduced and was compassionate to him. She requested Indra : "Let what may come to me come, but you flee away and save your life." The major part of the story is from the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*. It is not known what inspired a devout Vaiṣṇava saint like Mādhavadeva to introduce in the body of the Rāmāyaṇa the idea of worshipping the goddess Durgā, which was opposed to the poet's own creed.

Other Works

In sixteenth century Durgāvara Kāyastha composed the *Rāmāyaṇa* verses in songs to be sung in chorus—the Ojhā in which the leader recites the verses while the *Pālis* or the followers keep on repeating. Durgāvara's composition is based on Mādhava Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa* and not on Vālmīki. He has introduced quite a number of new episodes which were perhaps current at his time. Some of the new material found in Durgāvara's *Gīti Rāmāyaṇa* are as follows :

Offering *piṇḍa* to Daśaratha by Sītā on the river Phalgu, creation of unreal Ayodhyā at Daṇḍaka forest, playing of chess by Rāma and Sītā, portraying Sītā as the daughter of Mandodarī, drawing of three lines by Lakṣmaṇa in front of the cottage before he leaves in search of Rāma, the taunting reply given by the pair of birds (chākai-chakoā) etc. may be cited.

The complete work of Durgāvara is not available.

The *Ojhā*, in a group, recites these songs which are at the tip of their tongue. The poet Durgāvara devoted his attention to express the depth of sorrow of the human heart and hence he abridged the details of war and like matters. His other work *Manasā kāvya* is also based on sorrow.

Śaṅkaradeva, the great Vaiṣṇava saint and poet, preached Vaiṣṇavism based on the *Bhāgavata* and his worthy disciple Mādhavadeva followed him. The Bhakti cult prevaded every sphere of life and since that time literature of every description has Bhakti or devotion as the guiding spirit. In this period the colophons at the end of the each chapter of Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa* have been changed to suit the Bhakti cult.

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Not satisfied with this, Ananta Kandali, a Vaiṣṇava poet and follower of Śaṅkaradeva in the latter part of sixteenth century, retold the story of *Rāmāyaṇa* making Bhakti the main spirit and Rāma the complete and perfect manifestation of the full Brahman.

"Mādhava Kandali virichilā Rāmāyaṇa ।
Tāka śuni āmāra kautuka kare mana ॥
Rāmara sāmāya santa guṇa yathāvat ।
Bhajanīyā guṇa yata nabhaila vekat ॥
Eteke yatana karo bhakatika pade ॥"

(Mādhava Kandali rendered the *Rāmāyaṇa*, I have heard it with attention but feel unhappy. The common virtues of Rāma have been described; such virtues as make Rāma the object of worship, are not revealed and, therefore, my effort is to compose verses on the path of devotion.)

In this beautiful apologia the poet advances the reason for his rendering anew the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Assamese verses. Strangely enough, Ananta Kandali also rendered only five Kāṇḍas excluding the Ādi and Uttarakāṇḍas.

Rāmāyaṇa-candrikā by Kalāpacandra Dvija is a summary of the *Rāmāyaṇa*-story. The literary merit of this work of late 16th century is not of a high order.

In the middle of the 17th century one Ananta Kāyastha composed another work narrating the *Rāmāyaṇa*-story which was known as *Rāmakīrtana*. It is an imitation of the Kīrtana by Śaṅkaradeva.

While all the above-mentioned renderings are in verse, Raghunātha Mahanta in the first half of the 18th century retold the *Rāmāyaṇa*-story in simple Assamese prose. In his work, his deep learning in Nyāya and Vedānta is evident, but the author mainly depended on the version of Mādhava Kandali. The story is told with deep devotion. His style is simple :

"Janakanandinī swāmi āsibhāra dekhi āga bāḍhi
swāmika namilā.
Śrī Rāmara bhāva dekhi bulilā—He prāṇanātha
kene tomāra mukha paṅkaja mlān bhaila, rāja cihna
kene nāhi."

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A modern Assamese prose translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has been published recently by the Gauhati University.

Works based on themes taken from the Rāmāyaṇa

Śaṅkaradeva composed a drama (*Sītāswayambara*) dealing with the *Svayambara* of Sītā, which is staged in the Nāmghar (the community prayer hall). Here Rāma has been depicted as the incarnation of Viṣṇu.

Mahī-Rāvaṇa-vadha (killing of Mahī-Rāvaṇa by Hanumān), a small Kāvya, is from the pen of Ananta Kandali. In this work the poet describes how Mahī-Rāvaṇa, the son of Rāvaṇa, kidnapped Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to the nether world while they were asleep. He was ready to sacrifice them to Goddess Kālī. Hanuman appeared there and killed Mahī-Rāvaṇa and saved the brothers.

There are some works of a minor nature by junior poets on themes supposed to be taken from the *Rāmāyaṇa* but some of these episodes do not figure in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. Some of these are "Lakṣmaṇara śaktiśela" (Lakṣmaṇa injured by the spear), "Mandodarīra maṇiharaṇa" (Stealing of the gem of Mandodarī), "Sītāra pātāla-praveśa" (Sītā's disappearance into the Nether world) and a few others. This suggests the folklore-nature of the *Rāmakathā*.

Mention may be made here of one earlier work of 14th century by Harivara Vipra known as "Lava-Kuśara Yuddha" (fight by Lava and Kuśa). The plot is taken from the *Jaiminīya Mahābhārata*. This work describes how Babhruvāhana, the son of Arjuna, fought his father when the former arrested the sacrificial horse let loose by Arjuna, and in that context, the fight of Lava and Kuśa with their father Rāma is mentioned. In Assamese the poet composed two independent Kāvyas separately, "Lava-Kuśara Yuddha" and "Babhruvāhanara Yuddha."

It is interesting to note that in the early nineteenth century one Sūryakānta translated a part of the *Rāmacaritamānasa* of Tulasīdāsa into Assamese.

After the spread of the Bhakti cult, Kṛṣṇa became prominent. "Kṛṣṇastu bhagāvan swayam"—This has been the

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spirit behind all the literary compositions. Of course, Rāma, as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, has been identified with Kṛṣṇa and the devotion to Kṛṣṇa is also considered as devotion to Rāma (Śrīnāthe Jānakīnāthje abhedaḥ paramātmani). In a few Varagītas (noble numbers) by Śaṅkaradeva the exploits of Rāma have been extolled.

In the traditional Assamese theatrical performance which is known as "Bhawanā", dramas having *Rāmāyaṇa*-themes have been staged for centuries. Such performances have rendered the *Rāmāyaṇa*-story popular with the people of all walks of life. There are puppet plays also on themes taken from the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

In modern times quite a number of dramas have been composed on the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme and staged. Rāma has also been portrayed by some poets as an egoist and sef-conceited person who, to satisfy his ego went on exile without being asked to do so by anybody and banished his beloved wife on hearing some whisper about her.

In songs sung by the womenfolk and in folk tales also, *Rāmakathā* finds a prominent place. For instance, in some songs sung on the occasion of the marriage, the Swayambara of Sītā and the breaking the bow by Rāma are mentioned. Similarly, in folk tales, the transformation of Mārīca into a deceptive deer and Sītā's entrance into the Nether world are frequently mentioned. It is the belief of some people that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is not to be recited at night; if it is done, it brings sorrow.

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ORAL TRADITION OF THE RĀMĀYAṆA IN BENGAL

By **ASUTOSH BHATTACHARYA**

Oral tradition of literature in a social group develops in two ways—firstly it is derived from literary source, secondly it originates in an unlettered social group and ultimately becomes the source of its art literature. The oral tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the various States of Indian Union has been based on the great Indian epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa* by the great poet Vālmīki. Though composed in classical Sanskrit not intelligible to the unlettered, yet due to the efforts of a class of oral expounders it was made understood to the unlettered mass irrespective of caste and creed. It is apparent in the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself that Lava and Kuśa, the two sons of Rāmachandra, the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were the first two expounders of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the great poet Vālmīki himself gave special training to them in this method. Therefore, it seems that since the very completion of the great epic by Vālmīki it is being expounded before the mass in a method intelligbile to the unlettered. Thus illiteracy has never been a bar in India for learning in literature, philosophy and even higher scriptures. This practice of popular exposition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* continued throughout the centuries and throughout the whole of India and has been handed down to the present day in absolutely an unbroken tradition.

Sometimes it is Vālmīki's Sanskrit original, but more often now-a-days its local vernacular versions which are expounded before the enchanted mass through music, prose narration and dramatic monologues. Though there are special occasions yet hardly a day passes in rural and even in urban areas of India today where some talented expounder, sitting in a temple, a public place, sacred ghats of the Ganges or any other sacred river or even before a house or by the side of a public thoroughfare, does not expound to hundreds and thousands the story of Rāma, who at a great personal sacrifice upheld the cause of *Dharma*.

Inscriptional evidences show that Sanskrit language entered into Bengal as early as the 4th century A.D. during the Gupta

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period. But Sanskrit literature did not develop here before the Pala period beginning from the 7th century A.D. The Pala emperors were Buddhists by religion, yet they were great patrons of Sanskrit. They adopted it as their court language and used to issue royal declarations in it. They issued a number of copper plates and stone inscriptions in classical Sanskrit. They all show that Sanskrit had developed a literary style by that time. During the Pala period a number of Hindu temples were erected under the direct patronage of the Buddhist Pala emperors and Brahmins were offered free gift of land to establish themselves over the different part of the empire which extended at one time up to Kamrup in Assam in the east, Kashi towards west and Utkal towards the south. The Brahmins who were the custodians of the Hindu temples and properties donated by the emperors for their upkeep were mainly instrumental for spread of Sanskrit culture over the vast area. The temples became not only centres of religious practices, they also became the seats of learning. The Brahmin priests and the court poets of the emperors concentrated their attention to the development of Sanskrit literature by actively contributing to its different aspects of study. It is definitely understood that in the very beginning of the Pala period during the seventh century A.D. the legend of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was introduced to the people of Bengal. During the ninth century, a Bengali poet named Abhinanda composed a poem known as *Rāma-carita* on the basis of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by Vālmīki. Abhinanda was a court poet of a prince named Haravarsha who has been identified with Devapāla, son of the great Pala emperor Dharmapāla. This seems to be the first literary work written by a Bengali poet on *Rāmāyaṇa* though in Sanskrit. It must be remembered that Bengali language had not yet originated at that time. But the Bengali character of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was evident even at its very first composition by a Bengali poet, because in it we find even at that remote age the glorification of the goddess Devī by Hanumān. We know in subsequent ages from the Bengali versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* that Rāmachandra though an incarnate of Vishnu had to worship with the greatest devotion the goddess Devī before he could kill Rāvaṇa.

During the Pala period which continued from the seventh century to roughly the eleventh century A.D. Abhinanda's *Rāma-carita* was not the only work on the *Rāmāyaṇa* composed

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by a Bengali poet of the royal court. Another great poet named Sandhyākara Nandi whose name is more widely known for his greater scholarship and higher literary talent and more particularly due to the special character of his Kāvya composed a poem on the *Rāmāyaṇa* by the same name *Rāmacarita*. The poet most intelligently described in his poem the legend of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, on the one hand and on the other an account of the reign of the emperor Rāmapāla taking advantage of the common name of the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Pala emperor. Therefore, it is more or less a historical poem and is treated as a source of Pala history. From all these evidences it becomes apparent that the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was widely spread during the Pala period and by the method of pupular expounding of the theme it must have reached every heart even by that time. Even after the fall of the Pala Empire when Sena dynasty established itself over Bengal, study and popular expounding of the *Rāmāyaṇa* must have got an impetus inasmuch as the Sena Kings were orthodox Hindus and were responsible for the revival of Hinduism over Bengal.

A court poet of the Sena Kings known as Dhoyi is his poem named *Pavana-dūtam* has given an account by which it is seen that temples dedicated to Rāmacandra were erected on the two sides of the Bhāgīrathī during the twelfth century A.D. This established the fact that Rāma-cult became highly popular in Bengal as early as the 12th century A.D. Thus by that time the *Rāmāyaṇa* was widely known even by the common people. It is apparent that though ultimately due to some reason or other the Rāma-cult was replaced in Bengal by Kṛṣṇa-cult and Śakti-cult yet until the Turk invasion of the beginning of the 13th century Rāma-cult reigned supreme in Bengal. Ultimately, it had to compromise to a great extent with Kṛṣṇa-cult on the one hand and the Śakti-cult on the other. Yet the *Rāmāyaṇa* has continued its popularity till today.

I. Development of Oral Tradition

Until the Hindu period which abruptly ended at the very beginning of 13th century the royal court and the Hindu feudal chiefs continued to patronize Hindu religion and culture. But their medium was mainly Sanskrit. It is believed that Jayadeva's *Gīta-govinda* which was originally composed in local vernacular

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had to be rendered into Sanskrit due to its royal patron's zeal of championship for Sanskrit. But after Turk invasion when an independent Sultanate was established in Bengal the Muslim rulers adopted Bengali and they being averse to the study of Sanskrit, encouraged the study of the language of the soil instead. In the meantime, Bengali had developed into a full-fledged literary language. The great Bengali poet Chaṇḍīdās had already appeared and written his immortal lyrics on the divine love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Almost contemporaneous with Caṇḍīdās appeaed a great poet in Bengal during the 14th century A.D. He was Krittivāsa, himself a great Sanskrit scholar. He was requested by the then Muslim ruler of Bengal (probably Jalaluddin) to render the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* into Bengali for the 'benefit of the people'. He did it in Bengali verse with the greatest ability not only making a literal translation but also by incorporating all the local and popular legends which developed in Bengal on the basis of the orthodox *Rāmāyaṇa* since its introduction into this country. It grew, therefore, into a national Bengali epic.

The first great bar against *Rāmāyaṇa* being understood by the common people was thus removed and soon it became a household affair of the people. Since it was not necessary to expound the *Rāmāyaṇa* by a learned Sanskrit scholar, but even a person with a little learning in his mother tongue could do it without any effort. Traditional musicians with a little learning or in many cases with no learning at all, but having only a gifted voice and sharp memory took to the profession with great success.

Various methods of oral transmission of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were adopted by the professional expounders in the course of time. Some are stated below.

A. Kathakata

By *Kathakata* is meant discourse of the Purāṇas and the epics specially the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata* by a literate person making the theme more attractive than understandable to the unlettered and half-literate by means of music, dramatic monologue and prose narrations. It is only one man's performance. The *Kathak*, the reciter or the

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expounder first of all recites a couplet from the texts either in Sanskrit or in archaic Bengali and then goes on to elucidate it by quoting parallel couplets from the recognized authorities making his elucidation popular by appropriate popular similes and metaphors and music sung by himself and reciting some monolgues. As far as the *Rāmāyaṇa* is concerned this may continue for a week, twelve days or even up to a full month, according to the demand of the situation. It is held in some public place of the village or if engaged by any individual, in his own house. In the course of the discourse, the reciter does not strictly adhere to the text, but in order to make his theme acceptable to the rural folk, men and women, he incorporates popular legends current in oral tradition. He has to come down to the mental level of the people at large to make the theme appreciated by them. Therefore, highly artistic, religious, spiritual or philosophical aspects of the text on which the discourse should have been made is generally ignored almost everywhere. The high life of the royal family of Ayodhyā of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is dealt with like a domestic affair of a middle class Bengali family. Sometimes, humour of vulgar taste and rural obscenity are also introduced to cater to the taste of the rural people. Numerous incidents sometimes invented, sometimes adopted from local sources are incorporated in the course of the discourse. The rural listeners cannot distinguish between what is authentic text and what is unauthentic oral interpolations and they accept everythig as authentic and textual as far as the *Rāmāyaṇa* is concerned. If the reciter (*Kathak*) has some reputation in this field and if he continues his discourse in the same manner for some considerable period of time, his interpretations are standardized in the social life of the people.

The system of *Kathakata* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has been in vogue over this country since a very early period and an oral tradition of its own developed in the course of time. Because, the text of *Kathakata* has never been written down before the late 18th century A.D. The system was based on the text of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, yet the oral traditions which developed in the course of the oral discourse became also the integral part of it. Moreover, the oral traditions had undergone change from age to age according to the development of the socio-religious life of the people. In the Bengali translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by Krittivāsa, mentioned before, some of the traditions which

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developed orally due to *Kathakata*, have also been incorporated and they have ultimately been accepted as textual. Therefore, they differ in many respects from the original of Vālmīki. I believe this has been the case almost everywhere.

Kathakata had a tremendous influence on the people unlettered and half-literate and by this means not only the *Rāmāyaṇa* but also the entire *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata* and the other *Purāṇas* reached the mind of the people most effectively. That was the best possible medium of dissemination of knowledge to the largest number of people by the easiest means. A gifted *Kathaka* can keep his audience spell-bound for hours by means of display of his talent and he can create a deep and lasting influence in the minds of the people. It is said that Kashiram Das, the 17th century Bengali translator of the *Mahābhārata*, a man having very little education and a teacher in a Primary School by profession, composed his *Mahābhārata* in Bengali only by listening to *Kathakata* in the house of his patron. The *Kathakas* have practically recreated the *Rāmāyaṇa* for the people of Bengal. They could feel the pulse of the people. They exercised a great influence on the later Bengali translators of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and thus numerous unorthodox materials from oral tradition have entered into the translations of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* in the course of time.

The people having some creative urge react immediately to what they listen to in the course of *Kathakata* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and other texts. As a result they compose songs orally on their various aspects. Thus folk songs grow in a social group.

B. Folk Songs

Folk songs are the richest treasure of oral literature of any country. Innumerable folk-songs on the basis of the theme, spirit and ideas of the *Rāmāyaṇa* have been composed in this country and are still being composed in the countryside everyday in various forms and for various secular and non-secular purposes. Some of them can be enumerated below :

(i) Marriage Songs

The *Rāmāyaṇa* plays a vital role in marriage songs not only of Bengal but also throughout India in general and Northern India in particular. It is most frequent over the entire Gangetic

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valley from Uttar Pradesh to Bengal, covering the whole of North Bihar. Though the hero and heroine of this entire area of love-songs are Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, yet in the marriage songs the case is different, they being Rāma and Sītā. It is becaue love of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā did not have the necessary social sanction. Therefore, Rāma and Sītā are considered to be the ideal couple notwithstanding their extreme sufferings in life. Wherever any marriage is held in a Bengali family the bridegroom is considered Rāma and the bride Sītā. But in spite of this fact no father of a Bengali Hindu family would like to name his daughter Sītā or any name like Jānakī or Maithilī synonymous with it, because she was a life long sufferer in spite of her being the consort of Rāmacandra, the incarnation of Viṣṇu.

Marriage songs are sung by the womenfolk of the family in the course of observance of the various rituals, folk and orthodox, of the marriage and they are transmitted orally down the generation. In spite of the fact that there is no written record or printed texts of such songs they become an integral part of the social life of the people. The *Rāmāyaṇa* in these songs is brought down to the level of the common people and the names Rāma and Sītā, Daśaratha and Janaka are attributed to the common people having no aspiration and ambition in life besides their basic physical needs.

Ceremonially sending presents of toilet good for the bride from the bridegroom's house form one of the rituals of marriage ceremony. On this occasion is sung :

Rāma's mother Kauśalyā, the queen, says—

> Come, hurry up, time is passing away
> To send the toilet, Mithilā is far off;
> Marriage will be held there with Jānaka's daughter,
> The way is beset with danger of thieves and dacoits.
> Let them start before the sun sets.
> Offer you blessings, perform ceremonial rites,
> Let the desire of Kauśalyā's mind be fulfilled.[1]

[1] *Vangiya Loka-Samgit Ratnakar* (Ed. Asutosh Bhattacharyya), Vol. III, Calcutta, 1967, pp. 1383-84.

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It will be seen that the entire marriage arena has been transferred here from a Bengali village to Ayodhyā and Mithilā of ancient India and the Bengali mother of the bridegroom has been converted to Kauśalyā of Ayodhyā. The father of the bride is being considered Janaka of Mithilā to *Tretā* age.

The invitees of the marriage ceremony are also considered as gods and goddesses. Because every marriage ceremony is considered as sacred as the marriage ceremony of Rāmacandra, the incarnation of Viṣṇu. In one song it is heard :

> Let, O Durgā, let us go,
> Younger brother of Rāmacandra has invited us,
> Let, O Gangā, let us go,
> Younger brother of Rāmacandra has invited us,
> Let, O Padmā, let us go,
> Younger brother of Rāmacandra has invited us,
> Let, O Kālī, let us go,
> Younger brother of Rāmacandra has invited us,
> Let, O Padmā, let us go,
> Younger brother of Rāmacandra has invited us,
> To attend the marriage of Rāmachandra.[2]

Thus they all proceed to attend the marriage ceremony of a Bengali family.

Playing of dice by the bridegroom and the bride forms a ritual of Bengali marriage ceremony. The women sing as the couple continue the game :

> Listen, you all. Listen to the happy event :
> In the bed-chamber bedecked with jewels,
> With a canopy at the top, sitting on cool *pati* (bed-sheet)
> Rāma and Sītā play dice; maids fan them
> With fans made of mica, they chew betel leaves,
> The maids surround them with smiles on their faces—
> As if the moon is surrounded by the sparkling stars.
> In the chamber decorated with gold and jewels
> Rāmacandra plays dice with the beautiful Sītā.[3]

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[2] *Ibid.*, p. 1404.

[3] Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangalar Loka Sahitya*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1973 (4th ed.), p. 355.

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It is needless to point out here that the great poet Vālmīki who wrote the *Rāmāyaṇa* did not describe the marriage ceremony of Rāma in such detail. Not even the first Bengali translator of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* the poet Kṛttivāsa could dream of such details of the episode of Rāmacandra's marriage.

(ii) Rāmalīlā Jhumur

From a very early period, some temples of Raghunātha or Rāmacandra were established at the different parts of both East and West Bengal. Raghunātha temple of Vishnupur in Bankura district, Raghunāthabati in Midnapore district, Rāmarajatala in Howrah district and Rāma-Sītā temple at Dacca in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) bear testimony to this even to this day. All these ancient temples of Raghunātha or Rāmacandra were the great seats or centres of Rāma-worship in Bengal. All the year round festivals and religious discourses on the basis of the life, achievements and ideals of the character of Rāmacandra, the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, were held and the people used to participate in them with the greatest enthusiasm. Natural reaction of this was that a great creative urge was felt by the common people and folk songs on the different aspects of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were composed according to the process of growth of folk songs in a society. A class of folk songs which grew and developed on the basis of the episodes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was locally known over the Western border districts of West Bengal as *Rāmalīlā Jhumur* inasmuch as they described the exploits of Rāmacandra. *Jhumur* is the general name of the tribal songs over this area. The name has, however, been extended to the Bengali folk songs also. For example, folk songs composed on the basis of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are known as *Kṛṣṇalīlā Jhumur* and those composed on the basis of the *Mahābhārata* are known as *Bhārat-līlā Jhumur.*

There is a history behind the origin and development of *Jhumur* on Hindu and Vaiṣṇava themes over this area. In the 17th century A.D., a tribal chief of the status of a Rājā ruling over this area, until that time an animist by religion, adopted Vaiṣṇavism, a higher religion, not only for himself but also for the entire tribal group of people over whom his rule extended. Hindu and Vaiṣṇava poets, scholars and musicians, preachers and preceptors were invited and settled by him over the different

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parts of his country with liberal offer of free land and patronage. They introduced the *Rāmāyaṇa,* the *Mahābhārata,* the *Bhāgavata* and the *Padāvalī* or the Vaisnava lyrics among the people by *Kathakata* and various other means suitable for the rural people. The people also sharply reacted and composed for themselves orally a class of songs on the theme of each of the classics mentioned. *Rāmalīlā Jhumur*, though in most cases narrative in character, is yet not devoid of fine poetic sentiments. The following is the lamentation of Rāmacandra after Rāvaṇa's abduction of Sītā :

> Why is it that O Lakṣmaṇa, I don't see Sītā at the cottage?
> Can it be that she has been devoured by Rākṣasa?
> O one with beautiful face, in your absence
> I am as if a serpent without its jewel on the crest.
> O where is my Sītā, the moon-faced?
> Without the moon, the night is dark,
> Without Sītā I find darkness is enveloping me.
> O the wild creepers, please listen to me,
> Have you seen Sītā to pass this way?
> She possesses eyes resembling those of a deer,
> Her voice is as sweet as that of cuckoo's,
> Her gait is like that of an intoxicated elephant.
> Has lotus-faced Sītā concealed herself playfully
> In the water of the lotus-lake near by?
> O mother earth, blessed thou art, where is thy daughter?
> Tell me and pacify my restless heart.
> How cruel is God to me to steal my object of love!
> O my fate, how much sufferings are therein store for me?
> Loss of the throne, coming in exile, separation from wife,
> O what else have you written on my forehead, O cruel Fate?[4]

During the middle of the 19th century, the inaugurator of modern ideas in Bengali poetry Madhusudan Dutta, the poet of *Meghanād Badh Kāvya*, based on the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* wrote in a letter to one of his friends—'I despise Rāma and his followers but Rāvaṇa is a grand man.' And he, as a matter of fact, depicted Rāvaṇa as such—a manly character, only a victim at the hands of merciless Fate. The oral tradition of *Rāmāyaṇa*

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[4] *Vangiya Loka-Samgit Ratnakar, op. cit.,* Vol. II, Calcutta, 1966, pp. 726-27.

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as far as Rāvaṇa is concerned is not very much far from it. Because according to this, Rāvaṇa is a great devotee of Siva. He had undertaken hard penance in order to win favour of the great God Śiva. It is said that he severed his own head in the course of the penance and offered it to Śiva and in return he got ten heads instead. He was not only a devotee of Śiva but he also pleased the Goddess Kālī the terrible aspect of the Divine Mother, who used to protect him in the battle-field by shielding him personally from the attacks of his enemies. Rāvaṇa received the secret weapon of his death by his devotion to Śiva.

The rural folk poets have their own interpretation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* also. Sometimes such interpretations enhance the dignity of the characters of the great epic instead of lowering them in any way. One remarkable example can be cited to illustrate this point.

From Vālmīki's original *Rāmāyaṇa* down to its every translator in vernacular languages we find that after abducting Sītā from the Daṇḍaka forest Rāvaṇa confined her at the Aśoka garden and wanted to make courtship with her. But in *Rāmalīlā Jhumur* we find that Rāvaṇa carried Sītā to Laṅkā and offered worship to her there as his own mother. In a *Rāmalīlā Jhumur* we find :

> By crossing the sea Rāvaṇa carried Sītā to Laṅkā,
> And offered worship to her as his own mother.[5]

The courtship scene of Rāvaṇa with Sītā in the Aśoka garden has been described in some detail by Vālmīki and all his followers. But the oral tradition established by *Jhumur* over this area dismisses the idea of courtship altogether thus adding a sacred lustre to this epidode. According to this tradition Rāvaṇa abducted Sītā not to dishonour her in any way but only to agree to the request of Śūrpaṇakhā. Rāvaṇa is not a demon nor a devil here as has been depicted by Vālmīki, but a grand and dignified man.

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 727.

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(iii) Scroll-Painter's Songs

There is a community particularly in West Bengal bordering on Orissa on one side and Bihar on the other, known as *Patua* or scroll painters. They come of a very low social origin and hence they are not admitted in the Hindu community. They form their own social group though they have more inclination towards Muslim religion than Hindu. They earn their livelihood by painting episodes of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* the *Bhāgavata* and other local legends for entertainment of the people among whom they live. They exhibit the paintings in public in accompaniment of a class of narrative song sung by themselves. They paint on canvas, about 2 ft. in breadth and about 40 ft. in length, the events of an episode one below the other and roll it while carrying it from place to place or when not used. While exhibiting the paintings they unfold the scrolls and explain them to the lay public by means of songs they sing. The scroll painters are unlettered but hereditarily they possess the talent of painting and the knowledge of the traditional themes which they generally paint. The songs they sing are also inherited from their forefathers, sometimes newly composed songs are also added if the situation demands and if the painters have some talent for composition. The tradition is entirely oral and it has nothing to do with the texts either of Vālmīki or of Kṛttivāsa. These folk song are known as the songs of the scroll-painters of Bengal.

Among the themes of the songs and paintings, the *Rāmāyaṇa* plays a vital role. The scroll-painters have developed an oral tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of their own and they describe the incidents according to such tradition showing little regard either to Vālmīki or even to Kṛttivāsa, the translator. According to this tradition the characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* have been more naturalised in the environment of Bengali social and domestic life.

The scroll-painters select one independent incident from the *Rāmāyaṇa,* like killing of Sindhu, the young son of the blind ascetic parents by the king Daśaratha and illustrate the incident by means of folk-painting made on canvas as stated before. In the course of their public exhibition made from door to door in the villages, the scroll painters slowly unfold the scrolls and

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exhibit the paintings one by one as they explain them by singing a narrative song as follows :

Daśaratha, the son of King Aja (pronounced Raja),
Was sitting one day at his court with the courtiers.
His subjects prayed to him with folded palms. O King,
Vanquish Rāvaṇa with thy strength and be a real hero.
At this moment Jaṭāyu was flying over in the sky,
Daśaratha brough him down at his court.
The king said, O Jaṭāyu, my dearest friend[6],
I remember how you helped me in my distress.
Jaṭāyu replied, I am but a bird, denizen of the forest.
But I assure you of all help during your distress.
For all times specially over the wilderness where I stay,
Because I know the mystery of the forest, their dangers too.
Daśaratha embraced him, offered him his garland,
And thus was united with him by the bondage of friendship.

As I have already told there is little scope for display of poetic excellence in the scroll painters-songs, narration of the epidoses being the main factor. The composers and the narrators somehow narrate the incidents in their own way mostly in their local dialect without aiming at any merit in their form and contents. Yet sometimes, touch of genuine poetry can also be felt in them. When the blind ascetic-parents came to know of the King Daśaratha that their only son, the support of their old age and in blindness, had been killed by him, they lamented :

O Daśaratha! what do you tell me?
What words have been slipped off your mouth?
I have been struck by a thunder-bolt as it were,
My only son Sindhu used to feed us in hunger,
Offer water in our thirst, shelter during rain,
How, O cruel fate, can we survive without him.
O King, tell us, where have you killed him?
What harm did he do unto you that you punish him?
Tell us, tell O King, how can I console his mother?
O blood-thirsty cruel King of Ayodhyā, be damned.[7]

6 *Ibid.*, Vol. III, *op. cit.*, p. 1044.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 1045.

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The episodes like Rāmacandra's birth, his going to the court of Janaka with Lakṣmaṇa and marriage of Sītā, Rāmacandra's going to exile with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, his union with Bharata at Citrakūṭa, abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa, killing of Vāli, battle of Laṅkā and killing of Rāvaṇa with all his associates, return to Ayodhyā of Rāma with Sītā are all described in detail in different scrolls and relevant folk songs describing each separate scroll are sung by the professional scroll-painters.

(iv) Ritual Songs

The *Rāmāyaṇa* has also developed a ritual character in Bengal. In a family where any death, specially of any elderly person occurs, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in most cases only a part of it, is ceremonially performed on the day on which the *Śrāddha* or the funeral ceremony is held in the house of the deceased. In every house, irrespective of caste and creed, a *Śākta* or a *Vaiṣṇava*, it is the *Rāmāyaṇa* only which is to be performed for this purpose. No other work like *Gītā* or *Bhāgavata* or any *Upaniṣada* which deal more elaborately with the problems of life and death are considered suitable on this occasion. It is believed that the very recitation of the holy name of Rāma is the only thing which is effective for purification of the members of the deceased family.

There are professional musicians who are engaged for this purpose. They have a method of their own for the performance on this particular occasion. In the midst of the assembly of the members of the family and the relatives of the deceased including the invited villagers and traditional musician places a small earthen pitcher full of water with a twig of mango tree at the top and spots of vermilion painted on its outer side. The pitcher is considered sacred and dedicated to Rāmacandra. It is ceremonially immersed in some river or tank after the performance is over. The musician with a chowrie in one of his hands and a pair of *mandira* (brass bell) in the other and wearing a pair of jingling anklet stands up at the middle of the assembly and narrates musically the incidents of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, occasionally with a show of dance, particularly Rāma's going to exile and the death of Daśaratha including his cremation and funeral, in a most sorrowful tune befitting the occasion. Widows are generally permitted to attend such performances. The

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married women whose husbands are alive keep themselves off from them. Unmarried girls are also not permitted to attend the performances.

In the rural areas the performance is generally held after nightfall after the *Śrāddha* ceremony is over during the day-time and it continues till midnight. Sometimes in the urban areas it is also held during the day-time simultaneously with the performance of the rituals of the *Śrāddha* ceremony.

As I have already said, there are specific episodes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which are generally performed on this occasion. Exile of Rāma forms one of the most favourite themes. It is followed by the death of the King Daśaratha and long lamentation of the queens Kausalyā and Sumitrā. The traditional musicians known as the *Gayens* commit to memory the incidents in a pathetic musical tune befitting the occasion. The rural musicians have developed an oral tradition of their own as far as the sequences of the incidents are concerned. They go on performing the incidents with the help of two repeaters only known as *Dohars* and continue it for 4 to 5 hours in the night. In the course of the episode of exile of Rāma the musicians sing :

Blessed is Ayodhyā whose king is Daśaratha,
He rules his people with justice and equity.
One day as the king was sitting in the court,
He declared that he would offer his throne to Rāma.
Said he, 'O courtiers, prepare for the coronation,
Tomorrow morning Rāmacandra will ascend the throne'.
Glad were the people to listen to the declaration,
But when the maid-servant of Kaikeyī heard of it,
She hastened to the inner apartment and met her queen.
Said she with tears in her eyes, 'O unlucky queen,
Curse thyself, Kausalyā will be the royal mother.
Rāma will ascend the throne. Bharata will be nowhere.
There is yet time, hurry up, approach the forgetful king,
And remind him of the two promises which he made to you.
Let Rāma go to exile and Bharata get the throne.'[8]

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 1059-60.

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The fall into swoon of Lakṣmaṇa at the *Saktishel* thrown by Rāvaṇa is also lamented by Rāma thus :

> Ill-luck as I am I have no hope of victory,
> O my brother Lakṣmaṇa, respond to my call,
> I do not want to rescue Sītā, I shall return
> With thee, I shall beg from door to door,
> Never shall I return to Ayodhyā.
> O God, cruel God, how long shall you torture me?
> I have cried throughout my life, it has now come to an end.
> I shall break my head against stone due to grief,
> How far can you go leaving me behind, O Lakṣmaṇa?
> Mother Sumitrā offered her son to me,
> What should I say to her on my return without thee?
> When she will shed tears for thee, how shall I pacify her?
> So saying Rāma lost his consciousness.[9]

In a family where death has occurred only recently, artistic performance of a scene like this naturally creates deep impression. At the same time it is an indirect provision for consolation in bereavement.

C. Folk Drama

Folk Drama has been the most popular form of entertainment since a very early period of time in Bengal. We find a reference to a Bengali Folk Drama in the *Bauddha Gan O Doha* supposed to have been writen between the 7th and the 9th centuries A.D. It has been called *Buddha-Nāṭaka* or a drama on the life of Gautama Buddha. Its tradition has continued unbroken throughout the centuries up to the present generation.

Folk dramas in Bengali were known as *Naṭa-gīta* during the medieval centuries. It literally means dramatic music or in other words musical drama. Music mostly vocal is the main feature of the Bengali folk drama even to this day. Themes of Bengali folk drama have undergone changes with the development of socio-religious ideas and practices of the people from the earliest time to the present day. There was a time when the life of the Buddha offered the universal theme of Bengali folk-drama. Next to the Buddha, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma both appeared on the scene. It

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9 *Ibid.*, p. 1064

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is apparent that Kṛṣṇa was immediately followed by Rāma, but the latter could not replace Kṛṣṇa whose cult found a congenial environment for natural development on the soils of Bengal. However, parallel with Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Rāmacandra of the *Rāmāyaṇa* also played a significant role as the hero of folk drama of Bengal from the medieval period up to the present time. After *Naṭa-gīṭa*, the folk drama of Bengal took the new name of *Kṛṣṇa-Yātrā* wherein Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhāgavata* and other *Purāṇas* was the hero and the name of *Rāma-Yātrā* where Rāma of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was the hero. Both originated on the basis of oral tradition, but *Kṛṣṇa-Yātrā* ultimately developed a literary character also due to the literary efforts of some Vaiṣṇava religious leaders. But *Rāma-Yātrā* had never abandoned its folk and secular character even to this day.

During the 9th century both *Kṛṣṇa-Yātrā* and *Rāma-Yātrā* were tremendously influenced by the Western theatres which by that time had been established in Calcutta. As a result a new form of folk drama known as *Nūtan Yātrā* or *Yātrā* developed. During its formative period the *Rāmāyaṇa* played a vital role as its theme. But ultimately it took to historical and romantic themes also throwing the mythological themes in the background.

(i) Rāma-Yātrā

Rāma-Yātrā is a form of folk drama based on the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. At the time of its origin during the medieval ages it developed a religious character and was devotional in spirit. But in the course of time with the deterioration of its artistic character it developed a secular character. Rāma's worship of Caṇḍī before his attempt to kill Rāvaṇa and ultimately killing of Rāvaṇa by Rāma form the principal theme of the drama. The character of Hanumān plays a main role in it, but instead of creating a feeling of devotion, he performs rather a comic role today. Prose dialogues are occasionally used by the characters but there is no written text for them. They learn it orally from the senior members of the party. The theme mainly advances through vocal music performed by a class of vocalists who are not characters of the drama. All the while the vocalists go on repeating their music with the accompaniment of native

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instruments though a violin is also used to compose the orchestra. The characters participating in the performance are only few. Therefore, it is less expensive to hold its performance.

The language of the vocal music is highly artificial though the performers are all un-lettered and the theme had developed out of oral tradition only. Even the character of Hanumān has his vocal music which he performs in a highly ornamental language. He sings :

> If the lotus-eyed (Rāmacandra)
> Asks me to go to the lotus-pond,
> I shall go there and bring blue lotus
> To offer at the lotus-feet of the lotus-eyed.[10]

With a false notion of enhancing the dignity of the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and artificial language imitating the contemporary style of a highly pedantic character has been adopted by the rural composers of these folk-dramas.

Though secular in character *Rāma-Yātrā* was generally performed during the great Bengali festival Durgā Pūjā in the Autumn, Rāmacandra's worshipping of Durgā or Caṇḍī being its main theme. But it failed to develop any artistic excellence either in performance or in literary composition. Moreover, with its secularization and loss of devotional sentiment it lost its appeal among the people.

(ii) Śrīrāma-Panchali

Panchali is also a form of folk drama in which the characters do not put on costumes as in *Rāma-Yātrā*. The characters appear in different roles with plain dress. It is not the *Rāmāyaṇa* alone which is adopted as its theme. Though the *Rāmāyaṇa* predominates, yet the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhāgavata* and the other *Purāṇas* also provide themes for this purpose. Besides, local and popular legends are also adopted. There is no literary text for these so-called dramas; they have developed out of oral tradition only all the participants being un-lettered or half-literate. The absence of costumes or any artificial make-up is well compensated by wide use of varieties of music, both

[10] Tārakānāth Gangopādhyāya, *Svarnalata* (Ed. Asutosh Bhattacharyya,) Calcutta, 1963, p. 95.

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vocal and instrumental. Prose dialogues are avoided in the performances and the theme progresses only through vocal music which are of less narrative character. The same person may play the role of many characters and can represent both men and women in his own plain dress and plain voice. It is only the vocal music which is concerned here. There is no acting, no dance, not even the show of them anywhere in the play. The quality of the performance is judged by the music only.

Here is a scene from a *Panchali* on the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa.* Lakṣmaṇa returns to Ayodhyā after abandoning Sītā at the hermitage of Vālmīki and here is the dialogue performed through vocal music on this theme between Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.

Rāma: Tell me O Lakṣmaṇa, where have you left the chaste Sītā, I shall pacify myself listening to the news of her.

Lakṣmaṇa: At your behest I in haste left the chaste Sītā. In exile, while I returned I failed to turn at her. Flows of tears which I could not bear were coming of her eyes.

Rāma: O what a cruel heart thou possess, O Lakṣmaṇa! Did you not feel pain at thy cruel action? I might be a lunatic, why thyself became the same? Tell me, O Lakṣmaṇa, what an act have you done!

Lakṣmaṇa: Even the hell will refuse to punish me. There will be no place even there for me. I abandoned her for whom once I died. Who else can perform an act sinful like this.[11]

The pathos of the song is well expressed by the Vocalists.

(iii) Rāmāyaṇa Ballet[12]

A form of masked dance-drama popularly known as *Chhau* (from Sanskrit *Chhadma* meaning disguise) based on the theme

11 *Vangiya Loka Samgita Ratnakar, op. cit.,* Vol. III, p. 1069.

12 For detailed study of Rāmāyaṇa Ballet in Bengal, see Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Chhau Dance of Purulia* (Calcutta, 1972, published by Rabindra Bharati University.

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of a popular form of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is prevalent over the border districts of West Bengal adjoining Bihar. It has two other styles and forms, one in the Mayurbhanj District of Orissa and other in Seraikella in Bihar. But in West Bengal only, it is thematic and the *Rāmāyaṇa* from the beginning to the end provides its theme. Only in the course of the last five years this form of dance earned international reputation. The present author read a paper on this subject at the "First International Rāmāyaṇa Seminar" held in Indonesia in 1971 and in the following year he was invited to visit Western Europe with a troupe and to perform the dance-drama in England, France, Holland and Spain for one and half months. This year (1975) he was invited to visit U.S.A. and Canada with the same troupe for more than two months. It has been acclaimed everywhere as a unique form of Indian Dance not known before. The present author has had the good luck to "discover" it only a decade back in some tiny villages of West Bengal on her Western Border districts isolated by natural barriers. It has since been revived from a decaying state of existence.

The main feature of the dance is its masks which are made by papier mache by the rural artisans locally. Elaborate costumes befitting each character, male, female and animal, are put on along with the mask in the course of the dance. Musical instruments of two pieces of drums, one small and one big, occasionally with a *shenai* or pipe instrument are played in the background of the dance. The *Rāmāyaṇa* divided into different scenes is performed throughout. Occasionally over certain areas where the performance has been modernized the scenes of the *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavata* also have been adopted. But in more conservative areas the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the only theme. Three different communities contribute to the performance; firstly the Muṇḍa, who are aboriginals of Proto-Australoid group, the Dom, the scheduled caste Hindus and the Sūtradhār or the artisan class of caste Hindus. The Muṇḍas are basically the dancers, the Doms are the drummers and the Sūtradhārs are the mask-makers. They all live in the same area covered by the districts of Purulia, Bankura and Midnapur in West Bengal and Singhbhum in Bihar. It is apparent that the dance was originally a war dance. Due to subsequent Hindu influence the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has entered into it.

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(iv) Puppet Drama

A popular form of the *Rāmāyaṇa* having its origin in oral tradition is also performed in West Bengal through the various forms of puppet drama that still exist in this country in the rural areas. They are mainly the rod puppet and the marionette puppet. Though both of them adopt themes from the classics like the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata*, yet the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* predominates. In the rod puppet shows, life-size puppets are made by means of wood and the performers carry them on their shoulders having concealed themselves behind a thick screen. They speak the dialogue in prose, poetry and vocal music on behalf of the characters represented by each puppet. Sometimes, it is a whole night performance in the villages and the entire *Rāmāyaṇa* is performed in one night. But parts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are also performed when situation so demands.

There are professional parties which are engaged by the villagers on any festive occasion. There is no written text of the dramas performed. The theme is traditional and the dialogue is committed to memory from the earlier performers orally. In between the episodes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* sometimes relief scenes of secular nature are introduced. They represent snake-charmers, scavengers, drunkards etc. They have different songs befitting their character. A snake charmer sings :

> I am the snake charmer of the Maharaja,
> I am very qualified, I can catch snakes.
> By hundreds, by thousands, full of deadly venom
> I am the snake charmer of the Maharaja.[13]

A puppet representing the character of a snake-charmer with basket of snakes, is made to dance and make movement of hands and waist artificially to the great entertainment of the unsophisticated spectators. Sometimes, the serious characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are overshadowed by such secular characters in such performances.

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[13] *Vangiya Loka-Samgit Ratnakar*, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 1174.

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The marionette type of puppets are smaller in size and are made by torn pieces of cloth. They are very flexible and are manipulated by threads or strings on a small stage covered on three sides and open only in the front facing the audience. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is the basic theme of such performances. There are less prose or poetry dialogues and vocal music predominates in it.

(v) Kushane

In North Bengal generally covering the districts of Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar there is a folk entertainment known as *Kushane*. It is entirely based on the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The word *Kushane* is supposed to have been derived from the word *Kuśa*, son of Rāma, and one of the two musical reciters or rather expounders of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. A stringed folk instrument known as *Bena* is played throughout the performance which is mainly based on dance and vocal music. The theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is narrated with music and on the background of the narration. Kuśa, now a boy dressed as a girl, peforms dance. Sometimes in order to attribute a spectacular character to the dance the number of dancers is increased. Only very recently girls instead of boys are also being employed as dancers to give the group a more attractive look.

D. Oral Rāmāyaṇa

Two cases of the entire theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* being transmitted orally are also known. One is known as the Chandrāvatī's *Rāmāyaṇa* and the other is known as *Muṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa*. The former is widely sung by the women in East Bengal during occasion like birth of a child in a family, sacred thread ceremony of the Brahmin families and mainly during marriage ceremony. It is supposed to have been orally composed by a poetess Chandrāvatī who in her lonely life of celebacy used to worship the great God Śiva and composed the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Parts of it have so far been collected and it seems that it has followed a different tradition from Vālmīki's. Some of the incidents described by her are also available in the *Rāmāyaṇa* current in Malaysia and Thailand. According to her,

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Rāma had a sister named Kakuya. She provoked Rāmacandra to send Sītā to exile. This incident occurs in the Malaysian and Thai *Rāmāyaṇa* also. Chandrāvatī's *Rāmāyaṇa* being composed by a sad and lonely woman has laid emphasis on sentiment of pathos instead of on the heroic. Therefore, it is liked by the women who are mainly responsible for keeping it alive in memory even to this day.

According to Chandrāvatī's *Rāmāyaṇa* there is a story behind why Janaka declared to give his daughter in marriage to a person who could raise the bow of Śiva. One day, Janaka asked Sītā to clean his place of daily worship by means of cowdung. The bow of Śiva was placed nearby and Sītā in the course of cleaning the place raised the bow by her left hand and cleaned the place which was covered by it. Nobody could do it before. When Janaka entered to offer worship during mid-day he was surprised to find the place beneath the bow cleaned. He wanted to know of Sītā as to who had done that. Sītā admitted that it was she who did it. On this Janaka declared that he would give his daughter in marriage only to a person who could raise the bow of Śiva by his hand.

There are several stories told on the birth of Kuśa, one of the twin sons of Sītā. The story as told in Chandrāvatī's *Rāmāyaṇa* is as follows :

One day Sītā was going to fetch water from the river and left her only son Lava under the care of Vālmīki. But the old poet was unmindful and the little Lava followed his mother to the bank of the river unnoticed by Vālmīki. When all of a sudden Vālmīki came to realise that Lava was not there he could not understand what had happened of him. He immediately made a model of Lava by means of Kuśa-grass and infused life into it. Sītā returned from the river with her son and was surprised to see another boy exactly of the feature of Lava. Vālmīki realised his mistake and offered to Sītā the newly made child and asked her to adopt it as her son. He is known as Kuśa because he was created of Kuśa-grass.

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The *Muṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa* is also orally transmitted and is preserved in memory by the tribal people living over the border areas of West Bengal. The tribes include Santhāl, Muṇḍa, Bhuiyā, all speaking a Muṇḍa group of tribal language. This is obviously the result of Hindu influence on these tribes who live not only as neighbours but even among the Hindus. They have adopted the entire theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in their own language, though most of them are bi-lingual. They have their own way of entertaining themselves by musical performance of the theme. In the course of the performance they use a stringed instrument known in their own language as *Kendri*. One leads the music and the rest repeat. This way they perform during the whole night. It has been rendered into a narrative song.

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THE RĀMĀYAṆA IN ORIYA LITERATURE AND ORAL TRADITION

By NILAMANI MISHRA

The *Rāmāyaṇa* is the holy scripture and Rāma its legendary hero. The *Rāmāyaṇa* as sung by the immortal sage Vālmīki has had its impact at the various levels of society. It has grown deep into the structure of our social life. It is reflected in the legends, day-to-day conversation, customs and beliefs. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is a holy resort of the old and devout in Orissa and it is a common sight in almost all the villages to listen to the recital of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. People are very often moved to tears when Rāma has to leave for forest, when Sītā has to be abandoned and so on. The very name *Rāma* stands for justice, purity, truthfulness, dutifulness and other virtues. That the very utterance of the holy name *Rāma* saves people from the mundane life is the belief still current in Orissa as elsewhere.

Rāma in tradition

There is no place left in Orissa which has not received the magic touch of Rāma. It has become a habit to associate places, forests, hills and rivers with the incidents of *Rāmāyaṇa*. In the district of Phulbani in Orissa there is a hill named *Rāmagiri* about which there are many legends prevalent among the local people. It is identified as the same place which has found mention in *Meghadūta* of Kālidāsa. Koraput District abounds in such places which have some connection with the descriptions in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. People draw similarity between the existing *Citrakūṇḍa* Hill with *Citrakūṭa* of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mālkangiri* with *Mālayavanta*. People believe that Rāmacandra had offered *pūjā* to Gupteśvar during his forest-life; this is near Jeypore, in Koraput district. The rivers *Taperu* and *Arkeil* in Koraput district still bear many memorable episodes of Sītā.

In Keonjhar district there is a place called *Sītābiñji* famous for Ajanta style mural paintings. There, a small streamlet flows by, which is called *Sītāpari* and there is also a hillock which is said to be the store-house of Sītā.

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At the foot of Ushākoṭhi hills in the district of Sundargarh there is a small village called *Lakshmaṇapa* where Lakṣmaṇa used to live when Rāma and Sītā spent some days on the hill-top. There are oven-shaped marks and white lines on the hills which are believed to have been used by Sītā as kitchen. In Southern Orissa there are two fruits which are called *Rāma-phala* (Rāma-fruit) and *Sītā-phala* (Sītā-fruit). People believe that these two were used mostly by Rāma and Sītā during their forest-exile. In the rural life, people draw a similarity between a house-wife neglected by her husband and Sītā who had practically suffered in her separation. People also called a chaste woman Sītā.

The sincerity and faithfulness of Lakṣmaṇa towards his elder brother Rāmacandra is also reflected in the social life of Orissa. Brothers in a joint family living happily are termed as Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. A step-mother or a woman with quarrelsome bent of mind is named as Kaikeyī who created havoc in the life of Rāmacandra. Twin brothers are named Lava-Kuśa after the twin sons of Sītā. A faithful follower is very often termed Bharata or Hanumān. A lady who get maried to her brother-in-law (the younger brother of her husband) is nicknamed Mandodarī. The treacherous role of Vibhīṣaṇa is also not left out. He who plays a dubious role in the family is named Vibhīṣaṇa.

Rāmāyaṇa in Art

Modern Orissa which was known as Kalinga and Utkal in ancient times has a glorious tradition in art. The very names justify the fact. Innumerable monuments, temples, caves have dotted almost the whole landscape of Orissa. The different kings and emperors who have reigned the land have a special fascination towards temple-building. The great temples of Liṅgarāj, Purī, Koṇārk, Rajarani are unique for their exquisite sculptural wealth and beautiful carvings of unparalleled monumental grandeur.

Khandagiri and Udaygiri in the outskirts of the new capital have the earliest representation of *Rāmāyaṇa*-episode in relief panels. Though no mention of Rāma has been made by the historians who have dealt with it so far, we can safely attribute the panel depicting a man with bow in hand chasing a fleeing antelope to the *Rāmāyaṇa*-episode of Rāma pursuing Mārīca.

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Then the history of Orissa lapses into a period of which no concrete accounts are available. It rises again to vigour with the construction of the temples Lakshmaṇeśvar, Bharateśvar and Śatrughneśvar during the hegemony of Mathar and Sailodbhavas. On the lintel of Śatrughneśvar, there is a carving of *Rāvaṇānugraha.* The theme has been taken from *Rāmāyaṇa.* Rāvaṇa being immersed in his devotion to Śiva, prays to the lord to leave the abode of Kailāsa and come to Laṅkā. But the Lord refuses and Rāvaṇa out of fury lifts the Kailāsa mountain. Pārvatī in panic gets hold of Śiva's neck, Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya and other followers of Śiva, with arms on, rush to give fight to Rāvaṇa. The whole episode beautifully carved with consummate skill, is a memorable treasure of Orissan plastic art.

Suvarṇajaleśvar built in 8th century contains fine panels of the *Rāmāyaṇa.* On the northern and western facades of the temple are depicted the scenes of *Māyāmṛga*, the duel between Sugrīva and Vāli and Rāma and Sugrīva in discussion. The carvings are vivid; the detail of Rāma shooting at Vāli from behind a tree and the terrified gesture of the antelope in the *Māyāmṛga* panels especially draw our attention.

There is the depiction of a monkey panel which is identified as the *Vānarasenā* of Rāmacandra in the Jagamohan of Liṅgarāj temple.

Besides the temples at Bhubaneswar, the Bārāhī temple built during the Somavamśī rule in the village Chourasi on the bank of the celebrated river Prāchī contains *Rāmāyaṇa*-episodes in its Jagamohan. The Maṇikeśvar temple in the district of Cuttack has also representation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*-scene, Rāma's return to Ayodhyā. Singhanath temple has also carvings of the *Rāmāyaṇa*-story. Contemporary to the Sun temple at Konark, the Somanāth temple in the village of Vishnupur of Purī District has attractive panels in bas-relief of the *Rāmāyaṇa*-episode.

After the culmination of the artistic achievements in the lyrical forms of Konark, Orissa experienced worst time with foreign invasions and weak successors. The worthy artists of Orissa could not take the risk of open display on the walls of temples and turned to palm-leaf miniatures.

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Although a majority of the manuscript-illustrations depict Kṛṣṇa-līlā, the *Rāmāyaṇa*-narrations are not left out. *Vaidehīśa Vilāsa* composed by the celebrated poet of Orissa, Kavi Samrāṭ *Upendra Bhañja,* where lines in stanzas begin with Oriya 'Va' and 'Ba', has beautiful depictions in pure indigenous style. The other pothis *Rāmābhiṣeka* and *Rāmalīlā* also have illustrations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which have become rare today.

Apart from the manuscripts, the *Rāmāyaṇa*-themes have appeared in *paṭṭa*-paintings which is a very old style of painting in Orissa. It is presumed that like Tibetan banners, these *paṭṭa*-paintings were used as a medium of preaching different religions at different periods of history. Like *Kṛṣṇa-līlā* stories, *Rāmāyaṇa*-episodes are also the favourite subjects with the traditional painters.

The Viriñchinārāyaṇa temple at Buguda in the district of Ganjam has murals on the walls in pure Odissi style. Following the *Vaidehīśa Vilāsa* of Upendra Bhañja, the painters have painted the scenes of *Māyāmṛga, Saptatāla Vedha, Bālivadha, Rāma-Rāvaṇa-Yuddha* etc. on the wall. These are quite unique for their narrative value and indigenous style.

Orissa villages with thatched mud houses have mural paintings on the walls with white powder. The Oriya house-wife is no less an artist; she paints the scenes of *Rāma-vivāha,* Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā etc. on the wall in a unique fashion.

The Orissa State Museum has two huge temple hangings in Kalamkari style depicting the battle-scene between Rāma and Rāvaṇa. These paintings are old and have very interesting forms and colour.

Apart from the paintings, many old buildings, temples and *Maṭhas* in Orissa have wooden carvings in the fashion of stone-bas-relief contemporary in time. The *Maṭhas* and temples in Orissa housing the deities of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā have wood carvings of *Rāmāyaṇa*-themes, on the door jambs, doors, porticos and pavilions.

The deities Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā placed inside the temples for worship have also artistic workmanship. The Raghunātha temple in Odagaon in Puri District and the

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Badacchata Maṭh, Chhaunimaṭh, Sanachhaṭa Maṭh, Papadia Maṭh, Kausalyadas Maṭh, Panjabi Maṭh, Neuldas Maṭh, Angila Chrata Maṭh, Bada Akhada Maṭh, Nirmohi Maṭh, Nirvāṇī Baiṭhak, Mahanirvāṇī Baiṭhak, Nirālambī Baiṭhak, Bibhuti Baiṭhak, Balagandicchata Maṭh, Manirama Maṭh, Ghumusar Maṭh, Sundardasa Maṭh, Badasanṭha Maṭh in Puri town. Haridakhandi Maṭh in district of Ganjam, Raghunathji temple in Jajpur town, Koraput district, Śrī Rāmaswāmī Maṭh near the Mahendra Tanaya River in Paralakhemundi, Rāmaswāmī Maṭh in Junagada, Kalahandi District and several other Maṭhs and temples have beautiful images which, from the artistic point of view, are of considerable interest.

Rāmāyaṇa in Sanskrit Literature

Sanskrit is the fountain-head of all regional languages in India. The regional languages have been influenced by the lyricism and brevity of Sanskrit. When the Rāma-theme got a place in Sanskrit, the regional languages reflected it in their own style and compositions.

Sanskrit literature had its beginnings in Orissa in the fourth century A.D. but the writings of this period do not contain the Rāma-theme. The first major work dealing with *Rāmāyaṇa* is the *Anargharāghava Nāṭaka* of Murāri Miśra. The poet is reputed for his new style, new adoptations highlighting the places of importance in Orissa in his play. Composed in a highly pedantic style, the demand of the age, the poet has made reasonable departures. He has brought in several characters and changes to establish the jealousy and vengeance of Rāvaṇa and his plot to rob Sītā. He plans to send not only Rāma but also Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa to the forest right from Mithilā without their returning to Ayodhyā.

The *Anargharāghava* is a full play in seven sets on the *Rāmāyaṇa.*

Murāri is succeeded in the field by Nārāyaṇa Satkavi of 11th century, a native of Samalpur. To his credit he had a poem (*Kāvya*) *Rāmābhyudaya.* The subsequent period in Orissa saw the most celebrated post Jayadeva. He has a reference to Rāma in his famous *Gīta Govinda.* Rāma had been described as the seventh in his *Daśavatāra-stuti.*

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Viśvānātha Kavirāja, the author of the *Sāhityadarpaṇa* figures next in the field of Sanskrit literature. *Rāghavavilāsa* is his contributon to Sanskrit Rāma-literature. With Viśvanātha closes the last chapter of Gaṅgā rule in Orissa.

On the advent of Solar (Sūrya) Dynasty, we come across a number of brilliant poets. The second Gajapati Puruṣottamadeva is credited with a number of poems which in reality were composed by his court poets, Kavichandra Ray Divākara Miśra, Kavīndra Mārkaṇḍeya Miśra etc. *Jānakī Pramoda* is a play written by Divākara Miśra and dedicated to the name of Puruṣottamadeva. Mārkaṇḍeya Miśra has another Kāvya *Daśagrīva-vadha* on the full *Rāmāyaṇa* with the Uttarakanda. Following the pattern adopted by Divākara Miśra in rendering the *Mahābhārata* and Kaviḍiṇḍima Jīvadevācārya in his *Bhaktibhāgavata*, the poet Mārkaṇḍeya has composed his Kāvya *Daśagrīvavadha.*

The great Sanskrit poet Kālidāsa first introduced the messenger (*Dūta*) poem, the *Meghadūta.* Following in the footsteps of the great poet, the Orissan, Sanskrit poet Kṛṣṇa Śrī Chandanana composed, *Abad Dūta* (the cloud messenger) in 18th century A.D.; the messenger here is intended to convey to Sītā in the Aśoka garden at Laṅkā the longings of Rāmacandra from Mālyavant.

Another interesting composition of this time is *Rāghava-Yādavīya* Mahākāvya of poet Bāsudev Praharāj. This poem has much similarity with the Sanskrit *Rāghava-pāṇḍavīya* Mahākāvya of Kavirāja. The peculiarity of this composition is that the same words spelt in different ways give two meanings, one for Rāma and the other for Kṛṣṇa. Both Rāmalīlā and Kṛṣṇalīlā themes have been harmoniously blended together in one Kāvya. This beautiful poem, still unpublished, commands respect from the elite even now. Kavicandra Pītāmbara Miśra who flourished in the latter part of 18th century has composed *Śrī Rāma Virudāvalī.*

The *Gīta Govinda* of Jayadeva made tremendous impact on the literature, art and culture of Orissa and this has been mentioned earlier. Mostly the trends lean on the Kṛṣṇa-theme. But making a departure in the theme though not in style, the poet Śitikaṇṭha of Jaypore in Koraput District has a *Gīta-Sītāvallabheśa* or *Gīta-Sītāvallabha*—song-drama (*Gīti-Nāṭak*) to

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his credit. This work has so close a resemblance to Jayadeva's that Śitikaṇṭha makes the same kind of beginning with a prayer to *Daśāvatāra*. Like the *Meghadūta*, Tarka Vācaspati Madhusūdan has a kāvya *Hanumat sandeśa* belonging to the early 20th century. This poet has very wisely imbibed the spirit of *Meghadūta* but to strike a novelty has made a reverse approach. Instead of sending message to Sītā, Hanuman carries the news of the grief-stricken Sītā, to Rāmacandra. The contemporary poet Pandit Sudarśan Pāṭhi's *Pādukāvijaya* on *Rāmakathā* is also a work worth mentioning.

Rāmāyaṇa in Oriya Purāṇa

Oriya writings and compositions reached to a much developed stage during the period of the Solar Dynasty. It gained both patronage and popularity. The common people opted for more easily understandable Oriya writings than for pedantic Sanskrit works. This age witnessed three stalwarts whose contributions are still very much endeared by the Oriya people. First among the trio is Sarala Dās, famous as the poet of *Mahābhārata* in each and every Oriya home. He has also composed a *Rāmāyaṇa* known as *Sapta Kāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa, Caṇḍī Purāṇa*, and *Vilaṅkā Rāmāyaṇa*. Sarala Dās, devoid of any formal education, is said to have been in the regiment of Gajapati Kapilendra Deva. He participated in several battles fought in southern tracts, the reflections of which are found in his compositions. The poet is quite a visionary and in order to make his writing more popular and acceptable by the common people, he has brought into his compositions, a number of imaginary characters. But the assimilation is so perfect, that these rather add to the beauty and novelty of his compositions. The social customs, prevalent in Orissa, cultural traits, the rivers, mountains, forests and places of the land found mention in his writings. This arouses a sort of national consciousness and common acceptance in Orissa.

Very ably he has incorporated a portion of *Rāmāyaṇa* to meet a query of Yudhiṣṭhira by the sage Mārkaṇḍeya. In his *Mahābhārata*, in a nutshell, he has narrated the whole of *Rāmāyaṇa* stretching from the birth of Bhagīratha to the return of Rāmacandra from Laṅkā to Ayodhyā. His treatment of the subject of Daśaratha not having a son follows the account as given by Kālidāsa in *Raghuvaṁśa* in the case of Dilīpa. A

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reader without access to *Raghuvaṁśa* will take this as a piece of originality in Sarala Dās. The dialogue at the meeting of Rāma with Paraśurāma while returning from Mithilā with the newly wedded Sītā shows also a novelty in the treatment of Sarala Dās.

The introduction of a combat with *Kubuja* the demon, before the above party entering Ayodhyā in their journey is a very interesting episode not to be found in other compositions. These imaginative introductions have enhanced the importance of this *Rāmāyaṇa* and placed it on a different footing from that of the other writings of this class.

Sarala Dās's *Vilaṅkā Rāmāyaṇa* has been very much influenced by the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*. The *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* has a peculiar theme wherein Rāma has to take it as a challenge to kill Sahasraśira Rāvaṇa (Rāvaṇa with thousand heads) in order to prove his valour. He is prompted to undertake such an endeavour on Sītā's denouncement of his bravery and virtues. But at the end Rāma accepts the defeat at the hands of Sītā who ultimately appears on the battle-front to kill Sahasraśira Rāvaṇa. The Orissa State Museum has in its collection, a manuscript *Saṁkṣipta Rāmāyaṇa* ascribed to Sarala Dās, but from the style of writing and the use of language, it is presumed that some other writer has given the name of Sarala Dās as the author of the work to enjoy the popularity of the celebrated poet.

Balarāma Dās is remembered daily by the devout Oriya people for his immortal *Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa*. There is not a single village in Orissa from where atleast a hundred set of Balarāma Dās's *Rāmāyaṇa* cannot be had. It is like the Bible in each and every Oriya home. Balarāma Dās flourished in the 16th century at a critical period when the Brahmin dominance was a stumbling block to all endeavours in Oriya language. He sustained the wrath of the pandits but his magnanimous personality overcame the initial oppositions and Balarāma Dās shone brighter in his writings. His association with Śrī Caitanya is a memorable incident in his career. His popularity helped to draw nearer a still greater man Jagannāth Dās, the architect of Oriya *Bhāgavata*. As providence would have in, Balarāma Dās initiated Jagannāth Dās at the behest of Śrī Caitanya and this enhanced the name and fame of the poet to a great extent.

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Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa is not a carbon copy of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. Balarāma Dās's vision has moved in novel creations making his work a striking one.

In *Vanavās* Prakaraṇ, Balarāma Dās's love for his land has brought Rāmacandra to Chandrabhāga, Koṇārk, Rāmachaṇḍī Bhubaneśwar, Purī, Beleśvar, Rishikulya etc.

In Kişkindhākāṇḍa, the insertion of the story of the Crane is his new creation. The contribution of an insignificant squirrel in construction of the *Setu* (Bridge) to Laṅkā is a very interesting episode in the Sundarakāṇḍa. The lines on the back of the squirrel are left over when Rāma patted the little animal out of love for its help.

Balarāma Dās's description of battles resembles very much the prevalent practice of warfare during the period of Solar dynasty. We come across a story of 'Santha Panda' in *Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa* which anticipates the episode of Satī Anusūyā.

Balarāma Dās in Laṅkākāṇḍa has given interesting origins of two very minor things. Mushroom is attributed to the broken umbrellas (*Chatra*) and the *Rāmtali* or *Dasakathia* (a folk musical instrument) is traced to the Rāvaṇa's court orchestra. Balarāma Dās has given a very vivid picture of Orissa's culture, customs and manners, food-habits, fairs and festivals in his composition. Very aptly he has described the ornaments of Sītā as was customary in Orissa, without following *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. *Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa* very aptly deserves the status of a national Purāṇa, which, in fact, it is with the Oriyas today.

The *Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa* is popularly known as *Dakṣhiṇī Rāmāyaṇa* in Southern Orissa (Districts of Ganjam, Koraput, Phulbani). Investigations reveal that the subsequent authors who copied the *Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa* have made some minor variations in the order of the incidents. But on the whole it preserves the spirit of the original one. Balarāma Dās has another creditable work *Rāmacaritāvalī*.

Jagannātha Dās, the last of the trio, popular for his Oriya *Bhāgavata*, also composed a *Rāmāyaṇa* which can be ascertained from *Śrī Jagannātha Caritāmṛta* of poet Divākara

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Dās, a disciple of Jagannātha Dās's philosophical order. Dr. Vijayachandra Majumdar mentions in his 'Typical selections from Oriya Literature' that Jagannātha Dās composed his *Rāmāyaṇa* just before the advent of Śrī Caitanya in Orissa. Since the language and style of the text as handed down do not agree with the time, it will be proper to infer that much of the original text of Jagannātha Dās's working had been lost at the hands of the subsequent generations of copyists. Yet Jagannātha Dās's *Rāmāyaṇa* is a beautiful work.

Mārkaṇḍeya Dās, a contemporary of Sarala Dās, is known in Orissa as the poet of *Keśava Koili*. He has also composed a *Rāmāyaṇa Mahabhasa,* following in the footsteps of Vālmīki. The *Daśagrīva-vadha* is a Sanskrit work prior to the composition of his Oriya works. *Mahabhasa* begins with a dramatic approach. Kailāsapati narrates to Pārvatī the stories of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. During the discourse Pāvatī falls asleep and Mahādeva's discourse receives response from a parrot on the tree-top. When the fact is revealed Mahādeva, out of rage, chases the parrot. But it escapes and moves from place to place singing the glory of the *Rāmāyaṇa.*

Vārānidhi Dās is the author of *Vilaṅkā Rāmāyaṇa*. The theme has a little variation. Vibhīṣaṇa, in order to get a trouble-free throne after the death of Rāvaṇa, prays to Rāma to kill Sahasraśira Rāvaṇa, a friend of Rāvaṇa. Considering the style, langauge and the feeling of the writing, it can be presumed that the impact of *Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa* is very much on the author. Some opine that this work is of Balarāma Dās who might have been otherwise known as Vārānidhi Dās or some disciple of that great poet might have dedicated the volume to his teacher.

Maheśvara Dās, follows Sarala Dās in style and content of the Rāma-theme. His work •*īkā Rāmāyaṇa,* or *Rāmāyaṇa* in short, is a much adored book. The poet has made use of ancient style and words, and his rendering of tragic incidents are heart-rending.

Haladhara Dās was related to the family of Rāja Mukunda Deva. He has written *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* in his old age. He has adopted the popular metre of the Oriya *Bhāgavata*. His composition is very lucid and simple. He is also a renowned translator and his works are read with love throughout Orissa.

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Keśava Tripathy is a poet with originality. He has a *Rāmāyaṇa* popularly called *Pūriṇa Rāmāyaṇa* which is neither a copy of Vālmīki nor one that followed *Jagamohan Rāmāyaṇa* of Balarāma Dās. He has instead of seven Kāṇḍas or divisions,

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Dās, a disciple of Jagannātha Dās's philosophical order. Dr. Vijayachandra Majumdar mentions in his 'Typical selections from Oriya Literature' that Jagannātha Dās composed his *Rāmāyaṇa* just before the advent of Śrī Caitanya in Orissa. Since the language and style of the text as handed down do not agree with the time, it will be proper to infer that much of the original text of Jagannātha Dās's working had been lost at the hands of the subsequent generations of copyists. Yet Jagannātha Dās's *Rāmāyaṇa* is a beautiful work.

Mārkaṇḍeya Dās, a contemporary of Sarala Dās, is known in Orissa as the poet of *Keśava Koili*. He has also composed a *Rāmāyaṇa Mahabhasa*, following in the footsteps of Vālmīki. The *Daśagrīva-vadha* is a Sanskrit work prior to the composition of his Oriya works. *Mahabhasa* begins with a dramatic approach. Kailāsapati narrates to Pārvatī the stories of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. During the discourse Pāvatī falls asleep and Mahādeva's discourse receives response from a parrot on the tree-top. When the fact is revealed Mahādeva, out of rage, chases the parrot. But it escapes and moves from place to place singing the glory of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

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made ten divisions of his work, dealing elaborately with the subject-matter without affecting the spirit of the theme. He has vividly described the Rāsalīlā (love play) of Rāma and Sītā on the banks of river Sarayū. He belongs to the former state of Mahuri in the district of Ganjam.

Sītācaraṇa Dās, a disciple of Balarām Dās, belongs to Jalantara. He has three works—*Bhaktirasārṇava Rāmāyaṇa, Rāmaguṇasāgara* and *Rāmarasāmṛta Rāmāyaṇa.* Apart from these three, he has also another *Rāmakāvya, Jānakīśa-Vilāsa.*

Kapileśvara Vidyābhūṣaṇa is a resident of the famous monumental town, Bhubaneśvar—He has evinced considerable interest in getting the unpublished works to limelight by translating the Sanakrit works into Oriya. His works are *Kapila Samhitā, Svarṇādri Mahodaya, Śaivāgama, Śivapurāṇa* and *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa.* Besides the poets already mentioned here, we have still a galaxy of poets credited with works on the *Rāmāyaṇa.* The *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* of Fakirmohan Senapati, *Rāmāyaṇa* of Bhagavata Prasad Dās, *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* of Ratnakar Gargabatu. *Vichitravilaṅkā* of Gopinath Kar, *Vilaṅkārasāmṛta* of Caitanyaguru, *Rāmarasāmṛta* of Bipracharan Dās, *Rāmāyaṇa* of Krishna Singh, *Rāmāyaṇa* of Kripasindhu Dās, *Lavakuśa-upākhyān* of Rāmakrishna Rath, *Mohana Rāmāyaṇa* of Bālakrishna Kar, *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* of Parikshita Dās, *Bāla Rāmāyaṇa* of Madhusudan Rao, *Raghunātha-kīrtan* of Narasinga Nath, *Rāmāyaṇasāra* of Jayakrishna Patnaik, *Sarala Rāmāyaṇa* of Rāmachandra Dās and *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (Prose) of Liṅgarāj Mishra are available in Orissa. From the fifteenth century down to the present day, a number of works have been composed on the *Rāmāyaṇa* spreading the glory of *Rāmakathā* far and wide.

It is a matter of happy coincidence that a few leaves containing the Oriya translation of *Rāmacarita Mānasa* of Tulasīdāsa have been found in the collection of Orissa State Museum; they appear to be one hundred year's old. The translator of the *Mānasa,* Madhusūdan Dās, is a Vaiṣṇava and widely travelled man. His incomplete translation contains Ayodhyā, Āraṇyak, Laṅkā and Uttara Kāṇḍas of the *Rāmāyaṇa.* Among the contemporary poets, Svapneśvara Dās, Jagabandhu Mahāpātra, Vikramadeva Verma, Trinātha Mishra, Lokha Prasad

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Dās, Rājkishore Kanungo have set their hands at the translation of the *Rāmacaritamānasa.*

Oriya Rāmakāvya

We have so far discussed the Rāma Sāhitya as written in the Purāṇic forms. We also saw the original works on the Rāma-theme. The exact translations of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* into Oriya and translations with creative additions, so far done in Orissa have also been noticed. Rāma has been portrayed as an Oriya hero in the social and cultural settings of Orissa in the writings of Sarala Dās, Balarāma Dās and Keśava Tripāṭhi and other Oriya authors.

Oriya Kāvyas also made their beginnings along with Purāṇas in Orissa. So far the Rāma-Purāṇas were writen mostly in 'Daṇḍī Vṛtta' which can be recited to a common gathering and can also be individually read with ease. Oriya Kāvyas are mainly lyrical with musical touch. Jayadeva's monumental *Gīta Govinda* made a great impact on Oriya Kāvyas. Now the Oriya Kāvyas were composed in lucid styles in different metres. Rāma Kāvyas written during the period were mainly in the following melodic patterns—Maṅgala-Gajjari, Kedāra, Rāmakeri, Maṅgala-dhanāshree, Gujjari, Nilinigouḍa, Chokhi, Maṅgala, Bibhāsa Gujjari etc.

Oriya Rāma Kāvyas are grouped as given below for convenience of study.

Chhanda

Chhanda is an important aspect of Oriya Kāvya composed in metres. Unlike wokrs based on 'Mātrā Chhandas', Oriya Kāvyas have adopted the tradition of *Aksharachhandas.*

Poet Arjun Dās's *Rāma Vibhā* Kāvya is the pioneering work in Oriya literature. The content of the book is the sum of a discourse on *Rāmāyaṇa* between Yudhiṣṭhira and Sage Mārkaṇḍeya from Tāḍakā Vadha, marriage of Rāma and his return to Ayodhyā with Sītā, composed in 12 chhandas. *Rāma Vibhā* is written in the early years of 16th century A.D.

Dhanañjaya Bhañja is the royal poet of the former State Ghumsara in Ganjam District.

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His *Śrī Rāma-Vilāsa* is a Mahākāvya with all the characteristic and specified descriptions needed for the purpose. Poet Dhanañjaya Bhañja descriptions are unique and his composition lyrical and couched in rhyming words.

Kānhu Dās, popularly known as Kanhai Dās of Ganjam District is the poet of *Rāma-rasāmṛta-sindhu.* The Kāvya is divided into 108 chapters, each containing 108 stanzas. The poet admits in Uttarakāṇḍa that he has followed *Hanumannāṭaka* of the version of Madhusūdana Miśra in his work.

Nīlakaṇṭha Dās's Kāvya *Rāmārcana Candrikā* is a voluminuous work containing fifty-two chapters. The work in addition to Rāmakathā includes the nine modes of Bhakti and the description of Rāma's mode of worship. Poet Nīlakaṇṭha Dās has styled himself as Rāma's Dāsa. He has given a unique information about the origin of Solar dynasty which is not mentioned either in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* or in any other works. Upendra Bhañja is the renowned poet of Orissa who is very much esteemed by the contemporary poets; he is a worthy heir of Bhañja family of Ghumusara in Ganjam District. Bhañja has dominated his age with his erudite writings. His poems vibrate with a rare lyricism and are very much on the lips of all ranging from the aristocratic prince and to the poor peasant. He is gifted with a rare talent of coining words, highlighting the rhyming beauty of the stanzas.

Following a coup, in the Bhañja family, the father of Upendra Bhañja, Nīlakaṇṭha Bhañja, had to give up the hope of the ancestral throne. Though born with a silver spoon, Upendra Bhañja has to retire to Nayagarh and lived there. Upendra Bhañja was a talented poet even in his early days. Being inspired by his grandfather Dhañjaya Bhañja, Upendra composed his work *Śrī Rāmalīlāmṛta* which elevated him to poetic fame. *Rāmalīlāmṛta* deals with the Ādikāṇḍa of *Rāmāyaṇa* containing the episodes of Rāma's going to forest with Viśvāmitra. Tāḍakāvadha, the protection of the Yajña, *Ahalyā-Uddhār, Śivadhanur Bhaṅga, Sītā-Vivāha,* and return to Ayodhyā. The young poet Upendra has given his masterly touches while decribing the beauty of Sītā, the arrangement of the *Svayamvara,* etc. He has adopted fourteen different modes such as Maṅgal Gujjari, Rāmakeri, Basant, Chokhi, Kalyān, Āhari etc. This he has composed during his short stay at his own State capital.

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Then a different Upendra of a more determined spirit, devoid the royal obligations, plunged himself into writings at Nayagarh seeking protection at the feet of Rāma, with the holy *Rāma-Tāraka Mantra* on his lips.

Among his notable works, *Lāvaṇyavatī, Koṭi-brahmāṇḍa Sundarī, Premasudhānidhi, Rāsalekhā, Suvarṇarekhā, Bhāvavatī, Rasikahārāvalī, Kālakautuka, Subhadrāharaṇa* and *Dasapoi*. We come across four works on Rāma-theme—*Rāmalīlāmṛta, Sholapoi Avanarasataraṅga* and *Vaidehīśa Vilāsa.*

Avanarsataraṅga is an interesting composition of Upendra involving great skill. Though the form is not totally new, still it is not an ordinary thing to go in far such an elaborate Kāvya with twelve chapters in twelve popular metres. Here the words do not bear any *Svaramātrā. Avanarasataraṅga* contains vivid description of love-stricken Rāma in the absence of Sītā. The longings of Rāma for Sītā heighten at the tender touch of cool winds. Rāma prays to the cloud to communicate his feelings to Sītā.

Upendra Bhañja's *Vaidehīśa Vilāsa* is a landmark in creative composition. Legend goes that he went in for this when his purely imaginative works *Lāvaṇyavtī* was not recognised at Varanasi. The poet took the composition of *Vaidehīśa Vilāsa, Kālakautaka* and *Subhadrāharaṇa* as a challenge when he was called upon to prove his worth as against the fame of Krishna Dās Bada Jena at the Mukti Mandapa of Jagannath temple Puri. Upendra did prove his worth and was crowned with the title 'Kavi Samrāṭ', a much coveted recognition of that time. He belonged to the 18th century A.D.

Vaidehīśa Vilāsa begins each stanza with 'Wa' throuhout its 52 chapters. Upendra is a poet well-versed in jugglery of words. *Yamaka, Mālā Yamaka, Svara Yaṃaka, Mahā Yamaka, Vakrokti, Uptrekṣā, Pratīpa, Virodhābhāsa* and other figures abound in *Vaidehīśa Vilāsa.*

Upendra Bhañja's *Vaidehīśa Vilāsa* made a tremendous impact on his age and on the writers that followed him. Several works were composed with stanzas beginning with a particular word throughout, Satyavādi Dās's *Sītā Vilāsa* with 'Sa', Bhubaneswar Kavichandra's *Sīteśa Vilāsa* with 'Sa', Rāma Dās's *Rāghava Vilāsa* with 'Ra' and Balaka Rāma Dās's *Janakīśa*

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Vilāsa with 'Ja', these are the outstanding works which maintained the style of *Vaidehīśa Vilāsa* in their compositions.

Īśvara Dāsa adopted a new technique in his composition *Nala Rāma Carita*. He has beautifully described the episode of both Nala and Rāma in alternative chapters. In the context of Vyāsa's discourse to Yudhiṣṭhira, the entire *Rāmāyaṇa* has been dealt with in *Nala-Rāma-Carita*.

The following are the poets who flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries A.D. and who have left behind *Rāmāyaṇa* compositions :

Dīnanidhi Dās with his work *Rāmāśvamedha Yajña*, Balukeśvar Mardaṛāj and his work *Rāma-Vivāh*, Gopīnāth Rath and his work *Rāmachandra Vihār*; Janārdana Dāsa and his *Rāghava-caritāmṛta*; Bipralakshmidhara and his work *Aṅgadachitta;* Magun Patnaik and his *Rāmacandra-vihāra*; Bhāgīrathī Dās and his *Śrī Rāma-vilāsa*; Chintāmani Dās's *Sītā-vivāha;* Balukeśa Śrīchandan and his *Maṅgala Gītā;* Jadumani Mohapatra's *Rāghava-vilāsa*; Rādhācharan Nayak and his *Rāsa Rāmāyaṇa Mañjarī*, Seba Dās and his *Rāma-Rahasya* deserve mention.

Koili

'Koili' or the poem written with Koili or cuckoo as the messenger from a love-stricken prince to his beloved at far off places in an important aspect of Oriya literature. Kālidāsa is the pioneer in setting the Megha (cloud) as the love-messenger. In Oriya, Mārkaṇḍeya Dās is the first poet who is credited with a *Koili* poem dealing with the Krishna episode. *Kāntā Koili* and *Śrī Rāma Koili* of Balarāma Dās are the two works on Rāma Kathā. In *Kāntā Koili* the grief-stricken Sītā sends her message to Śrī Rāma and in *Śrī Rāma Koili* Kausalyā, broods ever Rāma's departure to the forest on the eve of his coronation. Kausalyā's heart sinks with grief when she narrates the mother's feelings at the departure of her dear son.

Poi

Poi is a Prākrit form of 'Paḍi' an aspect of Sanskrit Kāvya 'Poi' is synonymous with 'chapter'. The Pois are in numerical orders, *Pancha Poi* to *Pachīsi Poi*. A Poi contains as many

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chapters as has been indicated in the title in such numbers of stanzas. The *Shola Poi* of Upendra Bhañja has sixteen chapters, each chapter consisting of sixteen stanzas. Poi is an interesting numerically arranged composition which is normally not found in other regional literatures. Upendra Bhañja is credited with three Pois such as *Dasa Poi, Bara Poi* and *Shola Poi*. The last mentioned work is on the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The next work *Pachisa Poi* or 25 chapters is another composition of Govardhan Dās. All the twenty-five chapters deal only with Laṅkā Kāṇḍa. A poem in Chokhi Vṛtta is appended at the beginning of this work which speaks of the whole of *Rāmāyaṇa* in brief.

Chautīsa

Chautīsa is another aspect of Oriya Literature. The poem is composed of stanzas beginning with the Oriya consonants from *Ka* to *Kṣa*. Kṣa is taken as a letter in the alphabet in Oriya literature. It is called 'Chautīsa' bearing on the Chautis or thirty-four Oriya letters heading the stanzas. Though works of this type are generally on Kṛṣṇalīlās, Chautīsas on Rāma are not negligible, being in hundreds.

Narendra Mangarāja's *Sītānucarita Chautīsa*, Bhobani Dās's *Rāma Janma Chautīsa,* Sadāśiva's *Vaidehī Chautīsa,* Viśvanātha's *Rāmakrodha Chautīsa,* Śrīdhara's *Rāmadhanurbhaṅga Chautīsa,* Lokanātha's *Rāmasmaraṇa Chautīsa* and *Rāma Vilāpa Chautīsa,* Rāmānanda's *Sītā Kāruṇya Chautīsa,* Śaṅkara Dās's *Hanumāna Chautīsa* are works worth mentioning in this class.

Līlā

Līlā is a form of song drama staged under the open sky with the audience sitting around. The characters in Līlā throw their dialogues in poetry. The peculiarity of the Līlā is that the individual characters announce their entry into the Stage by themselves, for example, when Hanumān comes to the stage, he announces that Hanumān has come and he has taken his seat on the branches of śimśupa tree. Līlās had their debut in 17th century Orissa. Viśvanātha Khuntia is the pioneer poet whose work 'Rāmalīlā' has gained fame as *Bisi Rāmalīlā* in Orissa. Rāmalīlās are staged mostly in countryside on the occasion of Rāma Navamī in the month of April and during Durgā Pūjā in

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October. The later writers on Rāmalīlā made much improvement, making it more suitable for the Stage.

Raghunāth Dās of 18th century A.D. composed in a more refined way. He allocated 13 Līlās or chapters in his work enactable in thiretten nights. These Līlās individually deal with different aspects of *Rāmāyaṇa*, such as Birth of Rāma, Marriage, Exile, Meeting with Jaṭāyus, Preparation of war, Death of Kumbhakarṇa, Death of Rāvaṇa etc.

With the growth of popularity of these two works, in nooks and corners of Orissa, poets started writing Rāmalīlās. The works of the following poets deserve mention in this category :

Rāmalīlās of Krishna Chandra Rājendra, Pītāmbara Rājendra, Vaiśya Sadāśiva, Bimbadhar Sāmanta, Brajabandhu Sāmant, Simhar Vikrama Narendra, Ananga Narendra, Raghunāth Singh, Gangadhar Pradhan and Bhikari Patnaik.

Yātrā

Yātrā is on old form of play like Līlā staged under the open sky. Vaishnaba Pani is the most popular under this kind of lay and organiser of Yātrā in Orissa. Though Yātrā received a set-back at the introduction of modern drama, it is again reviving in Orissa. Writings on Rāma-themes of Vaishnaba Pani, Balakrishna Mohanty, Rāmachandra Swain, Krishna Prasad Basu, Kshetramohan Panigrahi, Aswini Kumar Ghosh, Kavichandra Kalicharan Patnaik, Nāṭyāchārya Raghunāth Panda are widely staged in Orissa.

Bhajana

Orissa abounds in temples and *maṭhs* dedicated to Rāma. Devout people are also no less in Orissa. Poets, to satisfy the religious craving of the Oriya people, have also composed several Bhajanas in Oriya. Bhajana in Orissa are in chaupai form which is also prevalent in Hindi literature.

Orissa saw the advent of modern age in Oriya literature towards the last part of 19th century. Though the poets and writers aimed at modern themes, Rāma Kathā was not totally left out as a result of which writings on Rāma are not meagre in modern Oriya literature *Arkavamśāvatamsa* of Govinda Dās,

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Jānakī Vallabha Vilāsa of Gokulānanda Patnaik, *Tapasvinī* and *Indumatī* of Gangādhar Meher, *Vaidehī Vilāp* of Kahnialal Bose, *Vaidehī Vilāsa* of Narayan Tripathi, *Sītā Vivāha* of Harihar Mardaraj, *Śrī Rāma Rāsotsva, Sītāprema Taraṅginī* of Nīlakaṇṭha Ratha, *Śrī Rāmagītā Campū* of Somanātha Sāraṅgī, *Sītā Vanavāsa* of Madhusūdana Rao, *Sītā-Vanavāsa* of Nandakishore Bal, *Daśarath Viyoge* of Rādhānāth Ray. *Saticandrikā* of Mādhava Chandra Mishra have gained popularity with Oriya readers.

Rādhāmohan Gadnāyak, a renowened modern poet, has beautiful poems on *Rāmāyaṇa*, such as *Vibhīṣaṇa Utha, Age Pāshāni* (on Ahalyā), *Urmilā, Jaṭāyus* and *Dilīpa Nandinī.*

Beginning with art and sculpture in ancient days, we have a continuous flow of *Rāmāyaṇa.* The tradition has been well maintained by the poets, writers, painters and carvers of Orissa. With the modern age new norms and new thoughts have appeared in all the fields of creative work in Orissa. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is now written, and commented upon in modern light. The traditonal mode of thinking has given place to new lights, Rāvaṇa is discussed along with other evil characters which dominate the society today.

The comtemporary poets and writers whose works deserve mention, are Gopinath Nanda, Chakradhar Mohapatra, Kshetramohan Panigrahi, Khageswar Seth, Sarala Devi, Radhamohan Rajendra, Dr. Narendranath Mishra, Gopinath Singh, Ratnakar Gargabatu, Dr. Dhanesvar Mohapatra, Balabhadra Panigrahy, Anant Mohapatra, Bhikari Charan Das, Gopal Das, Banamali Sahitya Bhusan, Manoj Das, Kamapala Mishra etc.

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THE RĀMĀYAṆA IN INDIAN SCULPTURE

By C. SIVARAMAMURTI

The inspiration of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a theme did not confine itself to literary output, but expressed itself in music, dance and art. Sculpture and paintings freely drew on episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇas*. Panels illustrating scenes from the epic abound in temples not only all over this country but also in countries far away in South and South-East Asia, where the epic is woven into the web of the life of the people.

On the Indian soil the *Rāmāyaṇa*-story commenes its narration in stone carving in early Buddhist monuments giving the modified Jātaka version of the story. In the *Daśaratha Jātaka* panel occurring on the Barhut rail, the story is of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā as brothers and sister born to the senior queen of a king who, apprehending danger for their life from his younger queen, himself advised their going to the forest to escape treachery from their step-mother. All the three occur in the panel as wending their way to the forest. The story occurs again in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa where both the brothers and the sister are shown leading the life of hermits in a hermitage in the forest.

The *Sāma Jātaka* depicted at Sanchi, where the hermit-boy, a devoted son attending to the needs of his blind parents, is inadvertently shot by the king engaged in hunting, mistaking the gurgling sound of the water-pot filled by the boy to be the sound of the water lapped by a beast, is an adaptation of an early incident in Daśaratha's life narrated in Vālmīki on the eve of the King's death. The *Sāma Jātaka* has a representation in an early paintings from Ajanta in cave X.

The Gupta temple of Viṣṇu at Deogarh had a long series of panels representing the Brahmanical version of the Rāma-story. A panel now in the National Museum shows Rāma freeing Ahalyā from the curse of Gautama. Rāma is seated in the company of Viśvāmitra attended by Lakṣmaṇa and Ahalyā is bowing. As warriors, both the brothers have the *vaikakshyaka* or

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crossband over their chest and carry the bow. Another panel also in the National Museum represents the Śūrpaṇakhā-episode. Lakṣmaṇa is punishing the ogress with his raised sword while Rāma, seated, looks on with Sītā standing close to him. Yet, another panel, somewhat mutilated, shows Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa proceeding to the Daṇḍaka forest.

There are some panels at Deogarh, some of which are very interesting. One such is the representation of the three royal visitors in the hermitage of Atri and his aged wife Anusūyā who gave a rare perfume to Sītā in appreciation of her steadfast devotion to Rāma. This is a rare depiction of the sage Atri himself who occurs only in one solitary medieval panel representing the seven sages in Drākshārāma in Andhra Pradesh. Another fragment of what should have been a beautiful panel shows Vāli on the lap of Tārā with the arrow shot by Rāma sticking out on his chest. This is obviously the inspirer of a similar scene that occurs on the Rāshtrakūṭa monument at Ellora and even in far off Prambanan in Indonesia. The duel between Vāli and Sugrīva occurring here not only inspired but even supplied the pattern of depiction to the later sculptor at Prambanan and at Bentei Srei.

In the Bharat Kala Bhavan at Banaras is a Gupta panel that represents Nala building the bridge of rocks across the sea to enable the monkey hosts to cross the ocean and reach Laṅkā. Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sugrīva are there guiding the effort of the monkeys. This impressive sculpture is undoubtedly the inspirer of later representations in India and abroad, particularly in Prambanan where the narration is very elaborate. The panels of the Gupta times in Ramban Museum near Satna and the Gupta terracotta panels from the Museum at Jajjhar in Haryana are some more important depictions of *Rāmāyaṇa*-episodes. In the National Museum there is a fine terracotta from a place near Bhopal representing Sītā in the Aśoka grove, the very picture of grief as described in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Another fragement illustrates Rāvaṇa with the donkey-head on his crown so familiar a feature in Pahari and Rajasthani miniatures of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. This feature occurs not only in this early Gupta terracotta but is also repeated in the Gurjara-Pratihara representation of the scene of Rāvaṇa shaking the Kailasa, in the National Museum.

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In the sixth century Mugalarajapuram cave of the Vishnukuṇḍins in Vijayawada occurs the interesting scene of Hanumān meeting Sītā in the Aśoka grove of Rāvaṇa. It is indeed surprising that this scene represented here did not find any reproduction in the early Pallava monuments which were undoubtedly inspired by the art and architecture of Vishnukuṇḍins-caves even in some minor details like the horned dvārapālas, the family of three generations of cowherds and milk-maids seen in the Govardhana cave, which are seen at Mugalrajapuram.

Though Pallava sculpture representing *Rāmāyaṇa*-episodes is rare, there is ample evidence of the popularity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* text from which whole phrases and passages are quoted in Pallava inscriptions. The only episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* that occur in Pallava monuments are the shaking of Kailāsa by Rāvaṇa and the adoration of Śiva by Vāli and Gaṅgāvataraṇ or the descent of the celestial river on the locks of Śiva as narrated by Viśvāmitra to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.

In the very early Western Chalukyan apsidal temple of Durgā at Aihole there are panels on the sides of the platform of the *maṇḍapa* representing scenes from descriptions in the *Rāmāyaṇa* especially of the harem of Rāvaṇa and his folk in the nocturnal scene at Laṅkā witnessed by Hanumān. These are presupposed by similar groups in the harem of Siddhārtha depicted at Amarāvatī where the elaborte description of the sleeping damsels with musical instruments is meticulously followed by the sculptor.

In the Pāpanātha at Pattadakal there is the first systematic attempt to narrate the story of Rāma in a regular sequence with labels in early Canarese to explain the characters and episodes. The story commences with the Putrakāmeṣṭhi sacrifice performed by Daśaratha, the receipt of the vessel of ambrosia and the offering of it to the three queens and the story is continued through its ramifications. These have labels in very early Canarese which Cousens dates in the sixth century A.D. These mention Rāma, Sītā, Lakkana, Jaṭāyu, Sugrīvan, Bāli, Angajan, Rāvaṇan, Suppanaki, Kara-Dūṣaṇan, Nalan, Vibhīṣaṇan and Kumbhakarṇan. The fight between Rāma and the Khara-Dūṣaṇa-horde and the outbrust of Śūrpaṇakhā in the presence of

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Rāvaṇa are impressive. Equally interesting is the scene of the building of the bridge over the sea. The fight between Vāli and Sugrīva and between Rāvaṇa and Jaṭāyus here as well as in the Virūpāksha temple at Pattadakal, which is also very impressive, have served as the inspiration for the more mature and better designed depiction of the themes on the walls of the Kailāsa temple at Ellora. Here commences the representation of the ten heads of the demon king being shown as circle, *daśāsyachūḍāmaṇichakra* as described by Bāṇa, and not as a row of heads which is as inartistic as it is artificial and which however becomes a regular feature in the later decadent art of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries.

While in the Mallikārjuna temple, there is an exquisite representation of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in the forest searching for Sītā and the former in great grief at the sight of a pair of loving Krauñcha birds in his sudden recollection of Sītā and their mutual affection, in the Virūpāksha temple there is elaborate narration of successive scenes of the epic, like the Śūrpaṇakhā episode, her mutilation, the Khara-Dūshaṇa battle, the lament of Śūrpaṇakhā before Rāvaṇa, the sight of the golden deer, the chase for the deer, the shooting of the animal, Rāvaṇa carrying away Sītā, Jaṭāyus' valiant fight, the meeting of Rāma and Sugrīva, the Vāli-Sugrīva duel, the flight of Hanumān over the ocean and a momentary obstacle in the appearance of Surasā and Simhikā, Sītā in the Aśoka grove, and Hanumān meeting her, the bridge over the sea built by the monkey-troops and even the popular but textually unsupported incident of Hanumān seated on an elevated throne composed of his own expanded tail curled up in circlets to baffle Rāvaṇa himself seated on his high throne, the blaze of Laṅkā and many such. In the Virūpāksha temple, the panels are smaller and are on the sides of pillars, while a long and larger series of panels decorate the outer walls of Pāpanātha, particularly to the south.

The high base of the massive central column in the court-yard of the Kailāsa temple has a series of long and intricate succession of scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* but they are all in miniature. The really large and imposing carving of a *Rāmāyaṇa* theme is Jaṭāyus fighting Rāvaṇa. This closely follows the earlier model of representation of the identical theme in the Vurūpāksha temple. The gigantic proportions of the overlord of

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demons is matched by the equally imposing figure of the monstrous bird in the presence of whom the demon's aerial car appears dwarf and insignificant.

Early Eastern Chālukyan sculpture should have had a good number of interesting panels of episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* which was a great favourite with the early Western Chālukyan sculptors whose traditions were carried over to the land where the younger brother of Puakeśin, Kubja Vishnuvardhana started a new dynasty. At any rate the vestiges of an early temple at Bhimavaran near Samaralakota in East Godavari District point to this. There is a fine mutilated sculpture of Rāvaṇa of early medieval date with his ten heads in a circle as in early Western Chālukyan and Rāshṭrakūṭa sculpture, found embedded along with other similar fragments in the wall of a compratively recent structure. This may very well have been part of a panel depicting the fight of Jaṭāyus which seems to have been a particularly favourite theme.

There is another panel of early Eastern Chālukyan workmanship fixed in the *maṇḍapa* at Jamidoddi in Vijayawada which illustrates an unusual scene, that of the sage who was entertained by celestial musicians in a mansion under the waters of the lake Panchāpsaras, as narrated in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The panel illustrates the sage listening with appreciation to the celestial music provided by the celestial nymphs.

The Chālukyan tradition of narrating the epics in decorative panels on monuments was continued by the Hoysala sculptors and there are interesting and spirited depictions of many an incident from the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata*. Arjuna shooting the fish, judging the aim by its reflection, Bhīma carrying loads of cooked rice for Hiḍimbā, Ghaṭotkacha attacking the enemy on the Kurukshetra battle-field are famous scenes. Similarly, there are scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The far-famed bow of Śiva that Rāma strung and broke is graphically presented in a large long carrier on several wheels dragged to the assembly of Janaka with great effort by a number of men. The marraige of Rāma and Sītā and the other three brothers with princesses of Janaka's house is again a picturesque scene. The spotting of the golden deer and Rāma's running after it, the shooting of seven trees with a single arrow are some more of

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the episodes depicted. These are miniature carvings running the whole length of the temple girth. The temple of Śiva at Halebid and of Chennakeśava at Belur are among the best known and richest in decorative sculpture of this kind.

In the Nāgeśvaram temple at Kumbakonam, the main shrine is of the early phase of Chola art in the ninth century and has exquisite sculptural decoration. The miniature decorative panels here from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, each of about six inches by four on the plinth, are almost missed except when approached for a special study; they are interesting for their aesthetic, archaeological and narrative value. The carving is so delicate that it looks like carving in ivory or fine-grained wood. The series starts as usual with the *putrakāmeṣṭhi* of Daśaratha, the receipt of ambrosia offered by the celestial being risen from the flames, the distribution of this milk food among the queens, the birth of the children, the princes with Viśvāmitra, the death of Tāḍakā, the protection of the sacrifice by the princes, the Ahalyā-episode, the breaking of the bow and the marriage of the princes and so on, covering almost all the important incidents. Many of these are especially interesting : Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā crossing the Ganges in the boat of Guha, the Śūrpaṇakhā-episode, the golden deer, Rāvaṇa fighting Jaṭāyus when carrying away Sītā, Sītā in the Aśoka grove, Hanumān watching her being threatened by ogresses, Hanumān meeting Rāvaṇa in his court, the glad tidings of the sighting of Sītā conveyed to Rāma by Hanumān, the laying of the bridge over the sea, the rousing of Kumbhakarṇa and his fight with the monkey-troops and so forth. The grouping of figures, action in ech of them, the stances and emotion, the background, technical details of foreshortening and laying of emphasis on special dynamic action and motion are all remarkable. There is no doubt that the *Rāmāyaṇa,* the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa's story from the *Harivaṁśa* and *Bhāgavata* were tremendously popular with the early Chola sculptor and it is no wonder that these are repeated in the Brahmapurīśvara temple at Pullamangai of about the same date. Here also they are almost of the same type of miniature panels running the whole length of the plinth and usually missed except when they are sought and studied with a trained eye. In the Śiva temple at Punjai, also very early Chola in date, these charming miniature panels illustrating the

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Rāmāyaṇa form a special noteworthy series. When we notice the fight of Rāvaṇa and Jaṭāyus and of Hanumān perched at an elevation on a pile of his own elongated tail, Kumbhakarṇa roused or Śūrpaṇakhā's wail before Rāvaṇa, we are at once struck by the similarity between these and the identical scenes occurring in the early Chālukya and Rāshṭrakūṭa monuments which reveals to us that there was a common language perfected by the sculptor in India that broadly determined the outlines of the composition for an episode, on which each master revealed himself in respect of the shaping of the details. This was still further continued during the centuries of Chola rule in their vast empire. In the Kampahareśvara temple also at Tribhuvanam in the twelfth century there are *Rāmāyaṇa* panels. Here too the fight between Jaṭāyus and Rāvaṇa, especially the shaping of the monster eagle recalls at once the early Western Chālukyan prototype that inspired the sculptor who reproduced it in the Rāshṭrakūṭa monument of Kailāsa at Ellora.

Some of the most exquisite bronzes fashioned in the early Chola period from about 1000 A.D. provide the most lovely images of Rāma in a group composed of the two brothers and Sītā and Hanumān in a reverential attitude. The famous Rāma-group from Vadakkupanayur now in the Madras Museum is the largest in size and most inviting in its aesthetic charm. This Rāma is the most imposing figure ever wrought in metal. The dignity of Rāma in his stance, the attitude of his hands suggesting the holding of the bow and arrow, the simple but effective decoration, the slight smile playing on his lips, have never been surpassed in any other representation in metal or stone. The figure of Sītā with an equally benevolent and smiling countenance, with a singular feminine grace enhanced by dignity and the charm of the flower-bedecked, meticulously arranged braid, forms a worthy comparison to Rāma. Lakṣmaṇa, distinctly younger with dignity and charm, stands second to Rāma, his hair dressed in such a way as to point out that the royal crown is for the senior prince. Hanumān of this group standing with his hand brought to the vicinity of his mouth as he reverentially makes a submission to his revered and beloved master is the very personification of devotion. Several similar imposing Rāma-groups in metal from the early Chola time onwards abound in South India. But there is rarely a group of

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the aesthetic quality of the above-described group, although it cannot be denied that the Rāma-group from Paruttiyūr of almost the same date and the very large and imposing figures of the Tillavilagam group are also great masterpieces. The most striking early Chola bronze, I had noticed years ago, connected with the Rāma-theme, is one of Sugrīva in Tirupati with his head thrown up and with his pointing figure placed on his nose expressing wonder, obviously at the prowess of Rāma when he shot seven trees with a single arrow at a time to prove his valour to Sugrīva.

In the Vijayanagar period the Rāma-theme became so widespread that there is scarcely a temple of some dimensions of that period in the Deccan and the South where the narration of the epic is not found. At Hampi there is a temple, Hazara Rāmasvāmī, that has a whole series like another to Rāmaswāmī close to the river at Tadpatri and another at Penukonda where there is a parallel series of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Bhāgavata* panels narrating the events of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. The pillars of the Kalyana maṇḍapa of the Jalakaṇṭheśvara temple at Vellore, like that of Mārgasahāyeśvara at Virinchipuram a few miles from Vellore and not removed much either in date, as well as the pillars in similar maṇḍapas in the Ranganātha temple at Srirangam and the Varadarāja temple at Kanchipuram, have several scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* like Hanumān presenting Sītā's chūḍāmaṇi jewel to Rāma, Hanumān accosting Rāvaṇa, Sugrīva comforting Rāma in his grief, Rāma embracing Hanumān in grateful appreciation of his guest and location of Sītā in Laṅkā, the duel between Vāli and Sugrīva and so forth; the exploits of Hanumān are mostly depicted as he became the national hero and symbol of devotion. The temples exclusively for Rāma multiplied during the period and during the Nayak rule in Tanjore was raised the most magnificent temple for Rāma which is a gem of the later phase of Vijayanagar art. It is a large structure with a spacious *maṇḍapa*, the several massive pillars of which lent themselves for executing large panels illustrating important events from the epic. Here is a fine example of Sugrīva close to Rāma as a dear friend, Hanumān humbly receiving the loving caressing of Rāma, Rāma's coronation and several other events, all in monumental proportions. But the most interesting work here is the large

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group of monoliths, all arranged in the most unusual way, as nowhere else in any *sanctum*, representing Rāma and Sītā seated at the centre, surrounded by Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Śatrughna, Sugrīva, Vibhīṣaṇa, Aṅgada and Jāmbavān, Hanumān seated in front reading out from a book obtruse passage of philosophy which Rāma with *vyākhyānamudrā* expounds to the sages.

Though the Vijayanagar traditions in art maintained an almost uniform style in almost all parts of a vast empire, with predominating Tamil influence in workmanship, there has however been a distinctiveness in the style of the Kerala country where the decorative detail and load of ornamentation of Hoysala sculpture continued to enwrap figures both in stone and wood. These weird forms in their turn determined the āhārya or dress and make-up in the Kathakali dance and even in the leather puppets and shadow figures that give a weird and bizarre appearance to some at least of the more agressive personalities portrayed. As painted wood work was in great favour along with the paintings themselves in Kerala, temples and palaces there, to a great extent, continued to have wooden constructions. We find there large rows of frieze under the eaves representing the story of Rāma or Kṛṣṇa in wood carvings. A whole series of wooden panels running whole length of the caves of a temple from Quilon, now preserved in the Madras Museum, deserves special mention. Daśaratha's consultations to perform the *putrakāmeṣṭhi*, the sacrifice, the celestial being from the fire with the vessel of ambrosia, Daśaratha dividing it among his queens, the birth of the four princes, their juvenile sports, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa accompanying Viśvāmitra, the death of Tāḍakā, the attack of Subāhu and Mārīca, the breaking of the bow and Sītā's marriage, run into a great length of continuous panels. The National Museum has a similar but shorter length of wooden carvings to illustrate Rāma's life. It is interesting to compare these panels with the paintings at Mattancheri palace. In stone and wood carvings as well as in the paintings of the temples at Kerala, the Rāma-group answering the *dhyānaśloka* describing Rāma expounding the philosophical texts read out by Hanumān in front of him and surrounded by his brothers Sugrīva, Vibhīṣaṇa, Jāmbavān and others, is a great favourite. Rāma is in such a representation depicted in *vīrāsana* with the right hand in *vyākhyānamudrā*, the attitude of expounding. It is interesting that with the *Rāmāyaṇa* doctrine spreading forth even in the

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North there appeared bronzes, as in South India, showing the group as in the *dhyāna.*

The Gurjara Pratihara phase of art in North India is noteworthy for the artistric excellence of the monuments of the period. In the Someśvara temple at Kiradu in Rajasthan there are some very interesting sculptured panels illustrating scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Grief-stricken Sītā in the Aśoka grove watched from above by Ḥanumān seated on branch of a tree, an oft-repeated subject, is seen here. Similarly, the fight of Vāli and Sugrīva. Monkeys carrying large boulders for laying the bridge on the ocean is another favourite theme repeated. Hanumān carrying the Sañjīvanī mountain for healing the mortal wound sustained by Lakṣmaṇa lying on the lap of Rāma is another well-executed panel. At Kekinda the Nīlakaṇṭha Mahādeva temple has a scene for the troop of monkeys accompanying Rāma, the construction of the bridge over the sea and a striking scene of Rāma learning from the dying Jaṭāyus, the whereabouts of Sītā and his granting of eternal bliss in the hereafter for the aged and devoted bird that laid down his life in the brave encounter with Rāvaṇa.

Early Pala art from Paharpur provides some amusing early terracottas and sculptures with monkeys as their theme, some of them appearing to be engaged in the work of laying the bridge on the ocean. But there is a dearth of definite *Rāmāyaṇa* panels in Pala sculpture where the theme of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma finds greater favour with the sculptor. It is rather in late Bengal terracottas that, on the basis of texts of the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries that the story of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are narrated profusely.

In the whole range of Chandella sculpture there is scarcely one to illustrate the story of Rāma except a huge monolith at Khajuraho representing Hanumān and dated by an inscription of 922 A.D.

Similarly, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is unrepresented in the Haihaya or Chedi school as none of the sculptures at Tripuri or elsewhere dwell on that theme. This is in spite of the fact that king Malayasimha compares himself to Hanumān in setting fire to the prosperity of enemies and had himself built a Rāma-temple.

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A refreshing evidence of the influence of the epic in some parts of North India is seen in the themes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* elaborated in what should have been a great length of frieze, one of probably many such, from a direlict temple in Haidarpur in the neighbourhood of Delhi; of this a single long piece carved on both sides has survived and is now kept in the Safdarjung premises of the Archaeological Survey. The sculptures are very interesting and the carving spirited. This should belong to the time of the Tomaras of Delhi and should be placed in the 12th century A.D. Here is an indication of the peculiar style of the late medieval period where the earlier Gurjara Pratihara traditions are continued with a modification and localisation of styles in Gahadavala, Chandella, Paramara, Chedi, Chahamana and Tomara schools. In Delhi itself there was an excellent temple of Viṣṇu at the famous Viṣṇugiri mound vestiges of which in the shape of a pillared hall are seen near the Kutb. The image of Viṣṇu discovered in this area and belonging to the twelfth century is now in the National Museum. It is therefore of special interest that other Viṣṇu temples with interesting decorative sculpture existed in this area from which the present long frieze is a survival.

One of the sides of the above-mentioned piece, better preserved than the other which mutilated here and there, shows a continuous narration. On the back it starts with Sītā in the Aśokavana, where on the tree is seated Hanumān awaiting an opportune moment to meet her, and is actually later shown with folded hands comforting sorrowing Sītā. Hanumān is next depicted uprooting trees and threatening the Rākṣasas who approach him headed by Akshakumāra and Indrajit, both in their chariots and fighting furiously. Hanumān is next brought before Rāvaṇa seated in state with his counsellers, the whole length of the tail of the great monkey held by a row of Rākṣasas, an excellent device of the sculptor to suggest Hanumān's power and grandeur. The other and better preserved side of the frieze shows an arrow flying over the ocean suggested by fishes, tortoises and crocodiles amidst waves. A long row of monkeys at the farthest end shows the carrying of rocks for building the causeway across the sea as Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa watch the work in progress. The fight of Lakṣmaṇa, his unconscious state

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as he lies wounded by *Brahmāstra* on the lap of lamenting Rāma, Sugrīva, Vibhīṣaṇa and Jāmbavān comforting Rāma and Hanumān bringing the Sañjīvanī hill, are all most interesting. The sculptor has the device here to suggest *Brahmāstra* by showing Brahmā on his swan besides the fallen Lakṣmaṇa. Similarly, the use of *Nāgāstra* by Indrajit is indicated by the hooded Nāgarāja on a stag. Kumbhakarṇa's fight with the monkeys who occupy his shoulder is equally interesting. Rāvaṇa's use of *Brahmāstra* is evident from his position in a chariot aiming darts at Lakṣmaṇa fallen on the ground.

This is just a rapid survey of the sculptural wealth in India on the theme of the epic which is so vast and spread all over the country in area, time and in the different historical phases, a subject which requires a special study in an elaborate monograph.

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RĀMĀYAṆA, THE EPIC OF ASIA

By LOKESH CHANDRA

Born as a primeval poem, the *Ādikāvya* in Vālmīki's metrical measure welling forth in all spontaneity at the grievous sight of the death of a love-lorn avian couple shot by a hunter, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, has become the lyric of the men of Asia from Siberia to Indonesia, filling their unbounded Self with ecstacy, with an ocean of bliss.

The Department of Culture of the Ministry of Education of the Government of Indonesia convened the first International *Rāmāyaṇa* Festival and Seminar in 1971. They deserve praise and gratitude of men of culture for providing a forum where the modern man of Asia can evaluate the creative role of *Rāmāyaṇa* through the ages, and its living unity of values in Asian societies. A literary oeuvre of sweeping majesty, it has gathered a momentum of its own, manifesting itself in the narrative arts of recitation by story-tellers, in declamations (like the babahasaan in Indonesia), the performing arts of classical ballet, theatre and shadow-play, or featured in plastic arts of stone-sculptures, wood-carvings and paintings; and lastly flourishing in creative writing in prose and poetry. It has been a force, a movement to translate social patterns and eternity of ideals and to esxplore realities of human existence, and to bring about better means of integrating *Homo ludens* and *Homo sapiens,* transcending all barriers to enlarge and intensify cultural understanding in our part of the world.

As early as A.D. 251, we find K'ang-seng-hui rendering the *Jātaka* form of the *Rāmāyaṇa* into Chinese, and in A.D. 472 appeared another Chinese translation of the *Nidāna* of Daśaratha from a lost Sanskrit text, by Kekaya. A long tradition in narrative and dramatic form created the great episodic cycle of the 16th century classic Chinese novel known as 'Monkey' or the Hsi-yu-chi which amalgamated among other elements the travels of Hanumān in quest of Sītā. This motif enriched popular culture and folklore and also contributed to the development of Chinese secular literature.

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In the sixth century the Sinhalese Poet-king Kumāradāsa, identified with Kumāradhātusena (who reigned during A.D. 517-526) composed the *Jānakīharaṇa*, the earliest Sanskrit work of Ceylon. Its verbatim Sinhalese paraphrase was done in the 12th century by an anonymous writer. It has been eulogised in several Sinhalese works. In our times, the Sinhalese translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by C. Don Bastean has been a decisive influence on the Sinhalese novel. Modern dramatists like John de Silva, an outstanding playwright, have adapted the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The popular appeal in Ceylon has been the ideal of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in general, and particularly the virtues of Sītā have ever been extolled, as in Indonesia.

In seventh century Cambodia, Khmer citations attest that the *Rāmāyaṇa* had become a major and favourite Epic. Its episodes symbolised great historic events in sculptured monuments. That the Khmers had been impregnated with the *Rāmāyaṇa* is evident from the fact that a name or a scene was sufficient to characterise a historic episode or to endow a socio-ethical problem with moral authority and special emotion. The depiction of the victorious exploits of Jayavarman VII against the Chams, on the exterior gallery of the Bayon, often follow the plot of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the Khmer king was a new Rāma to crush the king of Chams. Since Jayavarman VII, the *Rāmāyaṇa* became an integral part of Khmer life, played at feasts, figured on frescoes, and told by story-tellers. It is in fact the loveliest poetic expression of the soul of the Khmer people. A fact that merits particular attenditon is that the text followed at Angkor is closer to that of Java than to Vālmīki. It is a historic destiny that Indonesia should again come forth to organise the first International *Rāmāyaṇa* Festival, "to promote closer cooperation, harmny and peace..., to create a favourable atmosphere for mutual understanding and friendship" as expressed by His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Noer, the then Governor of East Java.

In the ninth century (according to the inscriptional evidence as interpreted by De Casparis), the *Rāmāyaṇa* was sculpted on Prambanan's Chandi, Loro Jongrang, the Temple of the Slender Maiden. These differ from the Classical Indonesian epic *Rāmāyaṇa Kakawin*, which means that the *Rāmāyaṇa* was prevalent in Indonesia in several versions. The *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs

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at Panataran display the predominance of local style. The entire story is not shown but only those scenes in which Hanumān and his simian army play a role. It points to the crystallisation of particular *Rāmāyaṇa*-scenes as prominent among the repertoire of the performing arts.

In about the end of the ninth century we even find an East Iranian version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Khotanese, an Iranian dialect prevalent in Khotan in Central Asia.

Since the 18th century, the *Rāmāyaṇa* became a dominant element in the performing arts of counties of South-East Asia. In Laos, Phra Chao Anurut (King Aniruddha) constructed the Vat Mai 'New Pagoda' over the Vat Si Phum. On its pylon are carved episodes from the epic. Of about the same period is the Vat Pe Ke with the most complete paintings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Laos. Needless to mention, that the *Rāmāyaṇa* plays a premier role in the Laos ballet. The Nāṭya Śālā or Ballet School at Vientianne teaches it regularly with its appropriate music and dance. When princess Dala (Tārā), daughter of King Savang Vatthana was married, the *Rāmāyaṇa* was danced in full regalia and splendour at Luang Prabang. The King of Laos is composing a new *Rāmāyaṇa* in the Loation language with an elaborate choreography. A complete manuscript of the Laotian *Rāmāyaṇa* is known in 40 bundles, of 20 leaves each at Vat Pra Keo, and another manuscript at Vat Sisaket. Mr. P.B. Lafont has published summaries of the *P'a Lak P'a Lam* (Dear Lakṣmaṇa and Dear Rāma) and the other version entitled *P'ommachak* (Sanskrit Brahmacakra).

The *Rāmakien* or *Rāmakīrti* is known to Thai choreography as masked play or Khon, as the Nang or shadow-play and as literary compositions emanating from the Thai monarchs themselves. The only complete version is of King Rāma I, and the most representable on the stage is that of Rāma II. The Silpakon or Royal Fine Arts Department, Bangkok, adapts these versions to suit the occasion or the performers, but the sung portions follow the aforesaid two versions. The version of King Rāma I is the best known, and for it the King used the classical *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki as authority. Thai scholars, like Prince Dhaninivat, derive their *Rāmakien* "from the Indonesian version no doubt prevailing in the epoch of the Śrīvijaya Empire." The

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Nang or shadow play with 'hide-figures' is mentioned in the Palatine Law of King Boromatrailokanāth enacted in 1458. The Nang reached the valley of Menam Chaophya via the Malay Peninsula from Indonesia.

The Malaysian *Hikayat Seri Rāma* (A.D. 1400-1500) has been a basis for the repertoire of Malay shadow plays, the Wayang Siam and Wayang Java. In spite of the marked toponymic nomenclature both have assumed distinct Malay forms. The similarity of technique indicates its Indonesian origin, which is conclusively proved by the use of Indonesian technical terms like *kelir, pang-gung, wayang* and *dalang*. The popularity of the Rāma Sage in Malaysia is attested by a variety of local literary versions. The Malaysian *dalang* may perform two to three hundred shows a year, but they are not mere entertainment. The performances are preceded by a ritual, offerings are made and invocations directed to ensure harmony. It is an urge, an *aṅgin* (Prāṇa) to perform, a "susceptibility to be moved greatly by the rhythm of the orchestra and a capability of identifying oneself completely with the characters of the drama, causing one experience intense emotions. If an individual does not continue his *aṅgin* he may lapse into a trance, a state of autohypnosis". (Prof. Amin Sweeney, London).

Burma too has known the *Rāmāyaṇa* since early centuries of the modern era. King Kyanzittha (A.D. 1084-1112) styled himself a descendant of Rāma. But, the performance of the Yāma-pwe (Yāma-Rāma) was introduced into Burma in 1767 from Thailand after the Burmese conquest of Thailand. The performance of the Yāma-pwe used to continue up to twenty-one nights, but these days it is a series of performances extending up to twelve nights.

The story of Rāma spread into the northern-most lands of Asia, via Tibet where it is found in two versions in manuscripts of the 7-9th centuries from the grottoes of Tun-huang, in an early 15th century poetical version of Zhang-Zhung-pa Chowang-drak-paipal, in the now-lost translation of Tārānātha, and in several versions scattered in commentaries on works on poetic and didactics, like the *Kāvyādarśa* and *Subhāṣitaratna-nidhi*. From Tibet, the *Rāmāyaṇa* reached Mongolia and thence spread far to the West, to the banks of the Volga. A folk version

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in Kalmuk language from the banks of the Volga, is known from the manuscript of Prof. C.F. Golstunsky, now preserved at the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. Prof. Damdin-Suren of Ulanbator (Mongolia) is working on the Mongolian *Rāmāyaṇa* in its literary and folk forms, in manuscripts preserved at Leningrad (USSR).

Nepal has the glory of preserving the oldest manuscript of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki dating to A.D. 1075. The legend of Rāma has ever found echoes at all levels of existence and consciousness, and it is but natural that the highest expression of modern Nepalese poetry should be Bhānubhakta Ācārya's *Rāmāyaṇa* in Nepalese verse, written around A.D. 1840.

In the backyards of the collective unconscious of the Philippines are repeated resonances of the epic of Rāma. In 1968, Prof. Juan R. Francisco discovered among the Muslim Maranaw a miniature version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as an *avatāra* of the remote literature of pre-Islamic Philippines. Among other Muslim tribes of the Philippines like the Magindanao and the Sulu too, folk recitation of this great epic survive in diluted versions.

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THE RĀMĀYAṆA IN MONGOLIA

By **T.S. DAMDINSUREN**

Rāmāyaṇa—the well-known Indian epic, widely spread in many countries of Central and South-Asia. Abstracts of separate motifs and forms of this epos are also found in Tibetan literature.

The earliest Tibetan manuscripts of fragments "Story about Rāma" dated VIII-X centuries were discovered by A. Stein in 1906-1908 in East Turkestan. These manuscripts contain several different versions of "Legends about Rāma." Probably they all penetrated into Tibet in different times from various areas, from India, Kashmir, Khotan and other regions of Central Asia.

As established by researchers, among Tibetan versions found in East Turkestan there is no version connected with the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki. Most of them are similar to the Jain version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and are obviously a record of folklore versions which were the bases of the literary production.

The name Rāma itself in Tibetan manuscripts from East Turkestan was fixed in the form Ramaṇa.

Many Indian literary works came to Mongolia as part of the general mass of Buddhist literature through Tibet. The legends about Rāma too passed through Mongolia in analogical form. By studying Mongolian literature of the past, I discovered four tales of Rāma in the Mongolian language and three in Tibetan. Let me set forth the tales about Rāma found by me :

In Mongolian :

1. Story about King Jīvaka. Manuscripts are in Leningrad.
2. Tale about Rāma from commentaries on "Subhāshita."
3. Story about Rāma from the historical work "Crystal Mirror."

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4. Tale about Rāma from terminological dictionary "Ear-Decoration."

In Tibetan :

1. Story about Rāma from commentaries on "Subhāshita."
2. Tale about Rāma from works by the Mongolian scholar Tubden Rabjamba of 19th century.
3. Tale about Rāma from Tibetan manuscript book.

I would like to give short account of the characteristics and general contents of some of them.

Story about King Jīvaka

This is one of the numerous Buddhist stories worked out of the plot of *Rāmāyaṇa*. Such workings in the Jātaka tales are common in Buddhist literature. Translations of the Jātaka about Daśaratha from Sanskrit, Chinese and Khotan and their investigations were published by scholars. In comparison with them our Jātaka about King Jīvaka is more extensive and artistic.

It should be noted that the Buddhist influence on our story compared with other Jātakas including *Daśaratha-Jātaka* is slight. It has some insertions, which can be easily removed, without affecting the main line of the story.

The Buddhist insertions are the following :

1. First prayer to preceptor and patron Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī.
2. King Jīvaka, in previous incarnation, became a Buddhist monarch and left his wife and son. Then the wife and son, becoming angry, cursed him that he remained without children in his future life. This is why in this birth king Jīvaka had no children.
3. King Jīvaka on the sea (may be on an isle) met Buddha Krakuchanda, paid his respects to him, listened to his sermons and invited to his home.

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4. King Jīvaka meets ten thousand fishermen and preaches against killing living beings. In consequence of that the fishermen are deprived of their profession.

5. At the end of the story, Rāma is identified with Buddha.

All these insertions, except the second, are in no way connected with the basic content of the story. In the speeches of some characters, for instance those of Rāma, Garuḍa, king of birds, remind us of corresponding texts from the *Prajñāpāramitasūtra.*

The story was, in all likelihood, translated from Tibetan in the 18th century but the Tibetan original of this story is not known to me. A number of Tibetan words were left without translation. For example, Karba/Tib mkhar-baa/-'Bronze', sele sbaram/Tib sa-le sbram/'nugget of Gold', dom/Tib. 'bear', la-du-Tib/la-du/'pie' and so forth. Six manuscripts of this story are kept in the library at Leningrad. All of them are written in Oirat scripts, the so-called, "clear script", composed in 1648. These manuscripts are very similar to one another and are records of one version.

As we have already mentioned, the story about King Jīvaka is possibly a translation from Tibetan. But in some places the world-view of the Mongolian translator is distinctly seen. For instance, in depicting the episode of Rāma chasing the antelope, the translator, perhaps himself, added that Rāma crossed nine passes, nine dales and nine rivers. This is a motif which is very often met with in Mongolian folk-lore. The episode in which the bird Garuḍa blocks the way of the demons, is still a more striking instance of this tendency. Characterising the swift flight of demons in the air, the translator writes about 'drawers', apparently the horses which can get fatigued, and about food reserves which also can be exhausted, if Garuḍa hampers them long. In this way the translator pictures the head-long flight of demons, as a long journey, like those which caravans perform in spacious steppes.

Let me give brief by the contents of the Story about the King Jīvaka.

Chapter I.—King Jivaka had three wives, but none of them had children. Dreaming of a descendant-son, he left for the

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ocean to search the flower udumbara, according to a soothsayer's instructions.

Chapter II.—The King came back home with the flower udumbara and gave it to his wives. Having eaten the flower, one of his wives gave birth to a son, who was named Rāma. When he grew up, he assumed the royal power, and honestly directing the country, could make all his subjects happy. He invited Buddha Krakuchanda who spread Buddhism among the people.

Chapter III.—One of the demons from the country of Laṅkā, turning into an antelope with a golden breast and silver croupe, distracted from contemplation of the sages living in the country of Rāma. Then they called the King and Rāma struck the antelope's eyes with a stone and cast her away. Thanking him, the sages endowed Rāma with invincible force.

Chapter IV.—In the country of demons, one of the old women gave birth to a girl. The soothsayer said that the country would be devastated if the girl remained alive. Then they put the girl into a chest and threw her into a sea.

Chapter V.—The trunk floated to the country of Jambūdvīpa and a peasant picked it up. Having reared the girl, he gave her in marriage to King Rāma.

Chapter VI.—The King of demons, Dashagrīva, head of ten chiefs, came to know from his sister that King Rāma had a beautiful wife. Turning one of his counsellors into a graceful antelope, Dashagrīva sent him to entice and take away Rāma. While Rāma pursued the swift antelope, the King of the demons abducted the wife of Rāma and took her to the country of Laṅkā.

Chapter VII.—In search of her, Rāma came to the Kingdom of the monkeys. There he saw two monkeys fighting. At the request of one of them Sugrīva, he killed the other monkey Bālin. In gratitude, Sugrīva gave him a force of monkeys headed by Hanumān. Together with him, Rāma made for the country of Laṅkā to free his wife.

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Chapter VIII.—Having defeated the demons, Rāma with his wife came back home where they led a happy life.

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Other stories about Rāma found by us are shorter than this story about King Jīvaka. The famous Tibetan scholar and poet of the 13th century Saja Pandita Gungajaltsan wrote the book "Subhāshita." On it there are three commentaries in Tibetan :

1. Commentary by Rinchinbal, written in 13th century.
2. Commentary by Tsultimbal.
3. Commentary without indication of author, under the name "Garland of Flowers."

In all these commentaries, there are brief accounts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in explaining the 321st verse of "Subhāshita." From the 13th century onwards, "Subhāshita" was repeatedly translated into Mongolian. Commentaries have been translated and retold. The most famous of them are the following :

1. Mongolian translation "Garland of Flowers", done by Choijamtso (16th-17th centuries).
2. Free narration by Chakhar gebshi Lobsantsultim, reproduced in xylograph in 1779.
3. Mongolian translation of commentaries by Rinchinbal, accomplished by Daigun Dayun (16-17th century).
4. West Mongolian translation of these commentaries, done by Tarsan, possibly, in 18th century.
5. Free retelling by the Buryat scholar Rinchin Nomtoev, 19th century. The Text and Russian translation of the story about Rāma from the commentary by Rinchin Nomtoev was published by me in 1974 in a collection of articles devoted to Professor G.D. Sanjeev. Of course, all these Mongolian translations of commentaries give only a brief account of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. They all bear witness to the subject of *Rāmāyaṇa* being ancient and widely known among Tibetan and Mongolian readers.

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Story of Rāma from Tibetan Manuscript Book

We had a chance to acquire a Tibetan manuscript, which contains two stories. One story about the origin of the river Gaṅgā which flowed in the sky at first and then came down to the earth. The other story is about the life of King Rāma and his wife Sītā. At the end of the manuscript it is said : "There are many different versions of the story about Rāma." It can be supposed that the author was one of the scholar Lamas of Mongolia. In Buddhist literature and particularly in poetic theory one or the other episode from the *Rāmāyaṇa* is often referred to. And such a story has referred to *Rāmāyaṇa* as its source. It is difficult to date the manuscript exactly, but it can be guessed that it dates not more than a hundred years.

Such a story is also in the historical work "Crystal Mirror" (Mong. "Bolor Toli"), written by Jambadorji in 1837, in Mongolia. In this work there is an Indian legend about the origin of the tribe Shakya and genealogy of the kings of this tribe of the so-called Sun Dynasty. Chronologically the legend covers an epoch from ancient times to the birth of Buddha. After mentioning King Daśaratha who lived in the city of Kapil, the author inserted a short story about Rāma in the text.

In these stories there is an interesting episode about a crystal palace of demons, on whose smooth walls are a hundred images of the King of demons. That is why Rāma could not find the real King of demons and strike him with an arrow. The clever counsellor Hanumān found out the secret and showed Rāma where exactly the real King of demons was; only then, Rāma could shoot an arrow and kill the demon.

There is no such episode in the classical version of *Rāmāyaṇa*, written by the poet Vālmīki, though there apparantly was this episode in some other oral version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or in a Buddhist version. For instance, it is referred to in the second chapter "Mirror of Poetry", by the Indian author Daṇḍin of the 7th century. Daṇḍin had the following expression : "On the walls of jewels was reflected the image of the sovereign of Laṅkā hundred times. Son of Andjan knew his whereabouts..." (Daṇḍin, *Kāvyādarśa*, chapter II, stanza 299).

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The influence of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Mongolia is to be investigaged not only in literature but also in other aspects of spiritual life. In Mongolia among Lamas, the cult of apes, images and figurines, were rather met with often. The ritual books devoted to apes show how to offer sacrifices, to ask for wealth and to fulfil their desires. Worship of apes in Mongolia cropped up under the influence of Indian customs; it is quite possible that it referred to the image of Hanumān from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The legend about the happy country of Shambal in the north was spread in Tibet and Mongolia. In the legend the general Hanumān is the counsellor of the King of Shambal. Not only by name but also by actions, he corresponds to the image of Hanumān in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The optimistic tone of the legend about Shambal showed the belief of the masses in a better future, and this is why it was very popular among people.

The following conclusion can therefore be drawn :

> Most of the stories found by us in Mongolia are part of popular works, known as in xylographic editions and in manuscripts. On these grounds one can affirm that the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the form of different stories was rather widely known in Mongolia. Despite their brevity, many of these stories are not bare retelling of events, but original artistic productions.

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THE RĀMĀYAṆA TRADITION AND THE PERFORMING ARTS

By **SURESH AWASTHI**

The *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition in India and South-east Asia, because of its pervasive character and deep-rootedness, has greatly influenced the beliefs, customs and life-styles of the peoples of these regions, comprised of different ethnic and cultural groups. The tradition has, for over two thousand years, been a vital and integral element of the culture of these countries. It has profoundly enriched the literary, performing and visual arts. Due to its dynamic character, the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition keeps adjusting itself to the new social settings, and continues to inspire and stimulate the creative urge of the people and their sense of ideals and values.

The tradition, along with an unbroken historical continuity, movers a wide spectrum of the socio-cultural life of the people, It has flourished and grown in the temple, the court, and the community, and in many periods of history the tradition simultaneously existed in all these centres and levels. The pattern in several countries has been the movement of the tradition from the temple to the community and from the community to the temple. This has influenced the material and nature of the tradition in many ways.

The tradition is marked by a sense of flexibility and openness. While it is influenced and conditioned by religious considerations, it transcends the frontiers of religion, operating as a cultural force. The epic, with all its religious associations and ritualistic content, always lent itself to transformation and adaptation to suit different theological considerations and cultural needs. Its dynamic character defied all efforts to narrow it down and stop its natural flow in different cultural and social channels. Rāma is an *Avatār* of Viṣṇu in Hindu tradition, a Bodhisattva in Buddhist tradition, a *Ślāka-Puruṣa* in Jain tradition, and a believer of Islam in Muslim tradition. It is this cross-cultural perspective of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition which is its most fascinating and rewarding aspect.

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There are four main aspects of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, the literary, the performing and the pictorial tradition. These four aspects of the tradition co-exist, overlap, inter-mingle and promote mutual exchanges; and it is in this very complex interaction that we can understand its true nature and role in the arts and life of the people of the Asian continent. In most of the studies and researches so far, this close and integral relationship between the various aspects has not been fully realised, and the tradition has often been studied in its different aspects isolated from one another.

In the study of the literary tradition, the role of the oral tradition has often been ignored. In fact, very little work has been done in the field of the oral tradition, which is fundamental for a proper study of the tradition. The oral tradition preceded the pictorial traditions in many countries before the appearance of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epics. While in India the rich and living oral tradition co-exists with literary tradition, it survives, in many countries only in the puppet theatre. Dalang, the main puppeteer, is a great repository of the oral tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The study of the oral tradition can also throw new light on the problem of migration of the tradition and its historical and artistic links between various countries.

The pictorial tradition also has close links, with that of the oral and performing tradition. The thematic content and artistic elements of the temple-reliefs can often be explained by referring to the oral tradition of the region and in some cases to the performing tradition. The conception of the characters; the conventions and principles for organising the scene; the setting for the action; and the costumes and ornamentation often follow the performing tradition. The *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs of Panataran temple in Jawa seem to depict the episode of Hanumān Dūta as performed in Wayang Kulit; and as regards iconograply, posture and grouping of characters, the reliefs have a close semblance to the Wayang performance. In India, shadow figures of Andhra Pradesh follow conventions and iconography of the mural paintings of the Lepakshi temple and the Paithan folk-paintings of Maharashtra. Medieval miniature paintings on the Rāma-theme also follow the principles and conventions of the traditional Rāma theatre, Rāmalīlā, in regard to the treatment of

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time and place and the organisation of action. The two important practices of the traditional *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre, namely, multiplicity of locale, and simultaneity of action are also followed in the traditional paintings. Inter-dependence of and collaboration between the performing and visual arts, a special feature of Asian theatre, is reflected sharply in the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* is performed in most countries having the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition. The performing tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has manifested itself in a great range and variety of forms having regional and stylistic variations—from the dramatic recitation of the epic story with simple mime to the highly stylised and codified forms of dance and theatre, and several forms of the puppet theatre. In the human theatre, *Rāmāyaṇa* is performed in innumerable modes—The processional and ritualistic Rāmalila of North India, and in the highly stylised and codidied dance theatre Kathakali of Kerala; in the highly theatrical Khon mask dance theatre of Thailand and in the extremely lyrical dance-drama of Bali. In the puppet theatre the epic is performed in forms ranging from the simple glove puppet of Kerala (India) to the highly refined shadow theatre, Wayang Kulit of Java.

While the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre is an integral part of the colourful and multiform traditional theatre of Asia, it is distinguished by many technical features. It is the most representative and artistically rich sector of the traditional theatre often adding a new dimension to the epic story and giving new interpretations to the characters. The epic story, with its legendary and mythical motives, eminently suited the stylised and convention-based traditional theatre of Asian countries. Elaborate preliminaries and rituals as part of the performance, and an enthusiastic and devoted audience sharing the myths and legends with the performers render the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre as the most participative theatre reflecting the beliefs, arts and values of the community.

In the performing tradition of the epic, the art of recitation is basic; and while having ritualistic significance, it also serves an important dramatic function. The performing tradition of the epic was born the day recitation was born, and recitation was born the day epic was born. Most of the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre and

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dance-forms, including the pupper theatre, have evolved out of recitation which acts as base-line upon which the superstructure of the form is raised. Even in the contemporary practice and also in new creations, recitation of the epic remains basic, and the performance looks like a dramatisation of the recitation. The tradition of recitation survives along with the literary and performing traditions in most of the countries.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, the idea of struggle between the forces of good and evil is so basic that it greatly influences the structure and nature of theatrical forms of various types. This idea of struggle is maintained and conveyed through a structuring of the form, peculiar of the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre. The general pattern is that in the first stage there is confrontation between the two forces; in the second stage, challenge; in the third, conflict and combat; and in the fourth, the victory of the forces representing good and the defeat of the forces representing evil. This pattern is followed in a variety of forms of theatre and dance dealing with the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme in all the countries.

It is to highlight this idea of a spiritual conflict that in almost all the forms of the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre, in all the countries, combat-scenes dominate the performance and are the most important and dramatic. In many cases, these are also most beautifully choreographed. From the artistic point of view, of interest is the characteristic that the choreography of the combat scenes is often inspired by the martial arts of the country or region concerned. The basic postures, attitudes and movements have close affinities with the martial arts. The performers as well as the audience take great delight in these scenes and get a kind of spiritual satisfaction in witnessing the defeat of the evil characters. In the traditional Rāma-theatre, Rāmalila of India, the burning of huge effigies of Rāvaṇa and his allies on the day of the enactment of the battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa is a grand ritualisation of this theme of the struggle between good and evil.

Of special interest to the scholars of the performing tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* should be the fact that the most ancient form of theatre employing the Rāma-theme, in many countries, is the shadow theatre. It is the shadow theatre which has given rise to

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several forms of human theatre. There has always been a close relationship of mutual exchange between the puppet and the haman theatre. These later forms of human theatre use many elements and conventions of the shadow theatre, and often follow the same division of the story, using the same script and the same music. In Bali and Java, the Wayang figures have influenced movements and attitudes of many characters (*e.g.*, Hanuman and Jaṭāyus) in the modern *Rāmāyaṇa* dance-drama. Even in the recent experimental..... movements of some of the characters are a further stylisation of movements followed in the Wayang theatre, *e.g.*, the movements of Mārīca in a combat sepuence with Rāma. The movements in the Khon mask dance of Thailand have a close resemblance with those of the shadow figures. The shadow theatre with its ancient origins and elaborate ceremonials is indicative of the fact that the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre has its basis in rituals.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* is much performed in various forms of the puppet theatre in India and the countries of the South-east Asia. The various forms of the puppet theatre using the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme are the leather puppet or the shadow theatre of various styles, the marionettes, the rod-puppets and the glove puppets. The puppet theatre is also perhaps the oldest form using the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme. The shadow theatre is the basic and dominant art form in Indonesia, Cambodia, Malaysia ànd Thailand.

In India, the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme seems to have been used from the 5th century B.C. in the shadow puppet theatre, references to which are found in early Buddhist literture. The tradition of the shadow theatre survives in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Karnataka and Kerala. Notwithstanding many common features and conventions, the four styles of shadow theatre differ in size and delineation of figures, and in the spoken-word material and music content. Other forms of the puppet theatre presenting Rāma-stories are the red-puppets of West Bengal, the glove-puppets of Kerala, and the marionettes prevalent in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

The shadow theatre in Java and in Bali is the most developed and highly cultivated theatre of this genre. With its deep ritualistic background and symbolic character it has a great socio-cultural significance and truly mirrors the beliefs, attitudes and traditions of the Indonesian people. With the spoken-word material of rich poetic content, we have elaborate and codified

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music; magnificent and highly stylised figures; and the developed art of manipulation and vocalisation. Indonesian shadow theatre provides a total theatrical experience. It is interesting to note that many preliminaries, and the rituals and ceremonials observed in Wayang Kulit and also its many conventions are similar to those followed in Indian shadow theatre.

In Thailand while the tradition of the large figures has already become extinct, that of the smaller figures is alive in the southern parts of the country, and shares many common features with the shadow theatre in Malaysia. The tradition of the shadow theatre existed in Thailand as oral tradition for several centuries before King Rāma I composed the epic poem towards the end of the 18th century. In Malaysia the shadow theatre continues to have a living tradition, and is the only form of the performing tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Malaysian shadow theatre has a certain vitality peculiar to a popular and folk art reflecting the oral tradition. In manipulation techniques and theatrical values this tradition is close to that of the Andhra Pradesh, India.

Cambodian shadow theatre is a developed form having large figures, beautifully cut out and delineated in dramatic postures and highly theatrical manipulation. In Cambodian shadow theatre figures are projected on a large screen employing a number of puppeteers in a performance specially during the royal processions and war scenes. The puppeteers manipulate while standing and walk in a stylised mimetic gait, depending upon the character they are manipulating, in the process projecting their choreographic movements to the figures.

The Cambodian figures cut out as sculptured form have close resemblance to the temple reliefs of Angkor Vat in iconography, posture, costume and ornamentation. A performance of shadow play looks like animated sculpture; and the reliefs, like a static moment in a performance, many figures are cut out as group figures with two or more characters portraying some important sequence, and these group figures follow the same pattern of organising the action as in the bas-reliefs. The reliefs presenting small groups are to be viewed in succession to comprehend a connected total episode. The

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narrative in the reliefs has a scheme of progression similar to that of the shadow theatre. The Cambodian example of the shadow theatre also makes the relationship between the performance and the pictorial tradition much more clear.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre is richest in episodes and spoken-word material. There has always been a close link between the literary and the performing traditions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*; and while the tradition of dramatic recitation of the epic started with Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, later *Rāmāyaṇa*s in various countries were always used as the primary source for episodes and textual material. Not only in human theatre, but also in the puppet theatre, the verses are taken from the *Rāmāyaṇa*s and other Rāma-poetry. It is this richness of literary content that has been the main factor for the sustenance and survival of the puppet theatre in Asia for nearly two thousand years. While watching a performance of the Andhra Pradesh shadow theatre, one also gets to listen to great poetry taken from Sanskrit and Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa*s.

During the medieval centuries many poets wrote epic poems on the Rāma-saga keeping in view the performing tradition and its requirements. Some wrote the epic primarily to be performed. Thai *Rāmāyaṇa* by King Rāma II and the Burmese *Rāmāyaṇa* by Natak Kyaw Gaung are dramatic versions of the epic story composed for theatrical performances. *Bengali Rāmāyaṇa* of Kṛttivāsa and *Vichitra Rāmāyaṇa* in Oriya are used by the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre of these regions for textual material. The *Rāmacaritamānasa* of Tulasidasa, having a sound dramatic design, greatly enriched and sustained Rāmalīlā, the traditional theatre of north India, which deals exclusively with the Rāma-theme. In South India, the *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* in Tamil, and the Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* of Raṅganātha, along with other *Rāmāyaṇa*s in Malayalam and Kannada supply spoken-word material to many forms of human and puppet theatre dealing with the Rāma-theme. Apart from acquiring the rich spoken-word material from the literary sources, the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre also uses a great deal of material from the oral tradition, specially in the puppet theatre. Thus, the performing tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* serves as a bridge between the literary and oral tradition.

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The *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre is a theatre of stylisation and conventions, which are, in many forms, strictly codified. The stylised make-up and costumes, the codified gait and movements, the recitative, chant-like delivery of stylisation, the basis having been provided by a non-realistic, imaginative approach to the theatre. Stylisation is primarily concerned with the treatment of the actor's face, dramatic speech, movements and gestures.

The highly stylised make-up in Kathakali, the powerful masks of Khon of Thailand and the lyrical mask used in Java are extremely effective devices to treat the actors' face. The stylised figures of the Wayand Kulit, the shadow play of Java, succeed in creating a world of mystery and fantasy, deepening the meaning of the epic story. The masks and make-up characters like Rāvaṇa, Hanumān and Jaṭāyus have inspired craftsmen to evolve stylised approaches to their designs and varied interpretations of the characters. The embroidered *zari* mask of Rāvaṇa used in the Rāmalīlā is an exquisite piece of art. The life-size mask of Jaṭāyus used in Ankia Nat of Assam, the mask of Rāvaṇa in the Shāhī Jātrā of Orissa and those used in Burmese dance drama are most dramatic and powerful masks. It is interesting to note that the scheme of colour symblism used in make-up is also more or less the same as that of masks and puppets. The masks represent the totality of the folk arts and crafts of the region and follow the elements and conventions of the plastic arts. The make-up and masks greatly accentuate and enrich stylisation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre, and impart to it a quality of other-worldliness.

Along with the rich thematic and textual content the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre also has a highly developed music and dance content. Music is the very dynamics of this theatre; and it determines the pace, the rhythm, and the movement of the drama. Specific melodies are fixed for various situations and actions, to express different sentiments and moods, and to accompany the entries and exists of the characters. Orchestral pieces are often used as incidental music, specially during the fight scene. The orchestra plays in unison with the vocal line and repeats the melodic phrase giving relief to the actor to present choreographic patterns and enrich his gestures by an elaborate intrerpretation of the text. The theatrical presentation

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with music, striking poses and gestures build up a spectacle of great choreographic beauty and pictorial charm.

The use of poetry, music, dance and mime; the intermingling of epic and lyric poetry and of narrative and dramatic material; the choreographic style of acting illuminating the gestures, poses and movements of the actor; conventions of speech, such as the alternation of prose and verse and a recitative and rhythmic mode of delivery; the use of singers and narrators; elaborate costumes; facial make-up and fantastic masks and head-gears with colour symblism and role stinction; freedom from the unities of time and place; elaborate preliminaries and rituals—these are the main features which characterise the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre of various countries. While the primary conventions and some of the practices have a pan-Asian character, the secondary conventions and some of the practices are indigenous reflecting the values of the traditional theatre of the country concerned.

The similarities of elements, performing techniques and conventions between various forms of the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre and dance, in various Asian countries, indicate a two-fold process of transformation and of continuing mutual exchange. The whole pattern of migration, assimilation and continuing exchange is as complex in the performing tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as it is in the literary, oral and pictorial traditions. The pattern becomes all the more complex because of two factors : one, the natural tendency and capacity of the indigenous artistic traditions to adapt and transform alien forms; and two, the coming of the influences from different parts of India and at different periods of history. The process of the transmission and transformation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tadition was never a simple one-way traffic. It must be viewed as a complex pattern; a two-way traffic; a situation having its feedback. It is interesting to note that, as a result of this process of transmission and acculturation, some of the ancient Indian forms, performing techniques and conventions which disappeared from the country of their origin, still survive in certain South-East Asian countries, especially in Bali and Java.

The urge to perform the *Rāmāyaṇa* is so great that new forms are continuously evolved as a result of the wedlock between the new performing techniques and the traditional material. The use and popularity of *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes in the

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traditional dance Kechak of Bali is the expression of this urge. Dance-dramas with modern choreography and certain other theatrical creations are comparatively new form in the long tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre. The dance-drama of Indonesia, in several regional styles, and of Thailand, Cambodia and Burma, has been structured utilising traditional dance material and various elements from the shadow theatre. In matters of costume, make-up, etc., the tendency is to follow the tradition, but the choreographer most creatively introduced to these elements a modern idiom and a more theatrical character. With their constituent elements of verses, mime and music these dance-dramas are structurally similar to the modern Indian dance-dramas.

The dramatic verse used in dance-drama is fully integrated with the music; the choreographic structure follows and is based upon the musical structure of the play. The spoken-word in poetic form provides the entire mise-en-scene, and the actor-dancer using symbolic gestures greatly enriches the dance-content. Kathakali represents a perfect integration of visual and aural effects in plastic form. The *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre of the dance-drama variety functions like a three dimensional montage. The meaning of the drama is carried by the poetry and is passed over into the gestures or into musical rhythm. It can be created by more than one mode in unison or in counterpoint.

In India too, during the last four decades or so, choreographers and dance directors have used the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme in dance-dramas and ballets, applying a variety of dance-styles both classical and folk. Udaya Shankar, the creator of the modern dance-drama, produced the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a spectacular shadow theatre with human actors. The late Shanti Bardhan produced a *Rāmāyaṇa* ballet using puppet-like choreographic movements. The Kalakshetra has produced a series of *Rāmāyaṇa* ballets in classical dance-styles, covering the entire epic story under the direction of Rukmini Devi Arundale. Bharatiya Kala Kendra's Rāmalīlā, encompassing the epic story in a spectacular dance-drama using a vast three-platform stage, has succeeded in reconstructing the traditional Rāmalīlā for the modern stage. The *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme has also fascinated the modern theatre artists and straight plays, interspersed with verse-dialogues and songs, have been written for the proscenium stage.

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THE RĀMĀYAṆA IN SCULPTURE AND PAINTINGS IN THAILAND

By M. C. SUBHADRADIS DISKUL

Before describing the subject of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Sculpture and Paintings in Thailand, the writer would like first to discuss on the division of History of Art periods in Thailand. The History of Art in Thailand except that of Prehistory has been more or less divided after the chronolgy of Thai history. It can be generally separated into two large epochs : before the Thai political domination and after the Thai Suzerainty. The first epoch can be again sub-divided into five periods : Ancient objects discovered in Thailand (*circa* 4th-6th century A.D.), Dvāravatī period (6th or 7th-11th century), Ancient Hindu Images in Thailand (7th-9th century), Śrīvijaya period (8th-13th century) and that of Lopburi (*circa* 11th-13th century). The second large Thai epoch comprises of those of Chiengsaen or Northern Thailand (*circa* 11th of 12th-18th century), Sukhothai (13th-14th century), U-tong (*circa* 12th-15th century), Ayudhya (14th-18th century) and Bangkok (from 1782).

Indian cultural influence arrived in the present-day Thailand from about the 4th century A.D. Archaeological evidence can be drawn from small Indian Amarāvatī or early Ceylon (Śrī Laṅkā) Buddha images. Hindu statues probably came a little bit later. There are three small stone images of Viṣṇu discovered in Southern Thailand. According to the theory of Professor Stanley J. O'Connor Jr. in his recent book "Hindu God of Peninsular Siam", these statues probably the earliest Hindu images found in South-east Asia. They resemble closely the Viṣṇu images of late Indian Mathurā and Amarāvatī styles. The god is wearing a decorated cylindrical hat, a pair of ear-rings, a necklace, armlets and bracelets. His upper right hand is probably holding a club and his lower right one raised in the attitude of dispelling fear. The upper left hand might hold a disc and the lower one is holding a conch on his left hip. The dress is composed of a *sarong* with a thick band of vertical folds in front and a broad sash tied horizontally across the waist with an end falling down on each side of the body. There is also a semi-circular loop (of

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the sash?) hanging down as a decoration on the front part of the body and the male organ can still be perceived under the thick vertical folds of the robe. This image can be dated probably about the 5th or 6th century A.D.

For the Dvāravatī period (6th or 7th-11th century A.D.), the art of which probably developed in central Thailand and then spread to the east, north-east, north and south of the country, most of the archaeological and artistic evidence denotes Buddhism of the Theravāda school with periodic intrusions of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Therefore so far the *Rāmāyaṇa* in sculpture and paintings has not been found during this period.

There are however images of many Hindu gods carved in stone from about the 7th to 9th century A.D. and can be grouped as Ancient Hindu Images in Thailand. Most of them were discovered in the southern, eastern and northern central parts of the country. Images found in the south and the east mostly represent standing Viṣṇu wearing a plain cylindrical hat and a long *sarong* with a thick band of vertical folds in front. His two upper arms hold respectively from right to left a disc and a conch and his two lower ones a lotus representing earth and a club. The scarfs tied across the hip can be arranged in two ways : diagonally and horizontally with the end hanging down on the right side of the body. The statue decorated with a diagonal scarf might be earlier than those wearing a horizontal one. These images denote the influence from the Indian post-Gupta style of the Pallava dynasty from south-eastern India. There are also three other stone images, two male and one female, which were under the trees at Takuapa, Pang-nga in southern Thailand and have now been preserved in the National Museum at Nakhon Sri Thammarat, also in the southern part of the country. They also denote the influence of the Indian Pallava school and might date back to the 8th-9th century. Originally they were thought to represent Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa* or Śivagaṅgāmūrti with Śiva in the centre flanked by Bhagīratha on his right and the goddess Gaṅgā on his left. Recently after the excavation of the three images before their removal to the Nakhon Sri Thammarat Museum, the original

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stone head of the central image was un-earthed, and they turned to be a triad of standing Viṣṇu flanked by a kneeling male and female attendant on either side.

Another school of stone sculpture representing Viṣṇu has also been discovered in the southern part of Thailand. It might be later than those described above and might be attributed to the 9th century. Some of the statues are larger than human size. They represent standing Viṣṇu wearing a cylindrical hat and having four arms. The body is rather muscular and standing in the round without any real support. The robe is still a long *sarong* with a thick band of vertical folds in front. The belt tied around the waist is rather small and the thick cloth scarf has disappeared.

At the town of Si Tep or Śrī Deva in northern central Thailand, a group of Hindu divinity stone images have also been discovered. Quite a few of them represent standing Viṣṇu but totally different from those found in southern and eastern Thailand. They wear an octagonal hat with a tiered-top leaving fringes of hair falling down on the shoulders. A short *sampot* is draped around the body with the end of the robe tucked between the legs and attached to the belt behind. Some of the images still stand in *tribhaṅga*. Apart from Viṣṇu, some of them might also represent Kṛṣṇa upholding the Mount Govardhana with his left arm. These images might date back to the 7th or 8th century A.D.

Now we come down to the Śrīvijaya period in Southern Thailand (8th-13th century) where the capital is still disputed whether it should be near the modern town of Palembang on the island of Sumatra or at Chaiya in the province of Suratthani in Southern Thailand. As during this period the majority of the population professed Mahāyāna Buddhism, only a few Hindu images have been discovered, for instance those of Śiva. According to the writer's knowledge, so far no *Rāmāyaṇa*-scenes have ever been found during this period.

For the Lopburi epoch (*circa* 11th-13th century), the Khmer influence spread from Cambodia into the north-eastern, eastern and central parts of Thailand. As the Khmer usually practised Hinduism much more than Buddhism (except only in the late

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12th and early 13th century) and during the 11th century Vaiṣṇavism came to the fore, many scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* were discovered in Thailand especially those carved on stone pediments and lintels of the Khmer or Lopburi towers. Most of them were carved in the first half of the 12th century. According to an article entitled "Essai d'interpretation d'une scene du *Rāmāyaṇa* representee sur un linteau d'art khmer" of Miss Uraisi Varasarin and Miss Nandana Chutiwongs printed in the book called "Art and Archaeology in Thailand" published by the Thai Fine Arts Department in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Thai National Museum, September 19, 1974, the two writers show photographs of 4 stone lintels of Lopburi style discovered in Thailand representing Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa entwined by *nāga*-noose from Indrajit's arrow and surrounded by lamenting monkeys, sometimes with Garuḍa flying down to free them. This according to the two writers were reproduced after Vālmīki's version.

At the Pimai Temple in the province of Nakhon Ratchasima, north-eastern Thailand, though the Sanctuary was constructed for Mahāyāna Buddhism about 1108, many stone pediments and lintels of the porches of the main sanctuary, of the southern fore-chamber and the galleries are carved with scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Here some details will be given. On the western side of the southern fore-chamber, a stone intel above the doorway is decorated with the scene of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa entwined by the *nāga*-noose (*nāgapāśa*) from the arrow of Indrajit, Rāvaṇa's son, and surrounded by monkeys as described above. On the pediment above is sculptured the descent of Garuḍa among other monkeys. These two scenes are therefore quite exceptional as they are complimentary to each other in the same story which is quite rare in Khmer art. The stone pediment and lintel of the western porch of the main sanctuary are also carved with scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. On the pediment is represented a fighting scene with two combating chariots which is quite difficult to identify but the lintel underneath displays the scene of the construction of a causeway to Laṅkā where one can see monkeys dumping stones into the ocean which abounds in sea animals such as fish, crocodiles and mythical aquatic monsters. On the northern porch of the main sanctuary is again carved an unidentified fighting scene

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from the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the pediment. Two scenes are sculptured on the pediment and lintel of the eastern porch of the main sanctuary. The one on the pediment might illustrate the descent of Rāvaṇa's grand-uncle to judge the case between his grand-nephew and Rāma whereas the scene on the lintel probably represents the episode when Lakṣmaṇa tries to cut the nose-tip and ear of Śūrpaṇakhā, Rāvaṇa's younger sister, while Rāma and Sītā, the latter being seated on the lap of the former, are looking on. For the eastern pediment and lintel of the southern fore-chamber in front of the main sanctuary the scene carved on the pediment represents Śiva and Umā, his consort seated on the bull Nandin on top of a row of the three great gods which comprise of Brahmā riding on a *hamsa* on the right, Indra on the three-headed elephant, Airāvata, in the centre and four-armed Viṣṇu on Garuḍa on the left, surrounded by smaller attendants. On the lintel is represented a nautical scene where many personages are seated in a boat which might suggest Rāma's entry into town after his conquest over Rāvaṇa and retrieval of Sītā. Two stone lintels which probably belonged to the galleries around the main sanctuary can be here cited. One represents Rāma shooting an arrow to a group of demons and the other probably *Rāma and Sugrīva being each borne on a palanquin by monkeys back into town, presumably after the first has killed Vālin, Sugrīva's elder brother.

There was also a beautiful stone pediment on the north of the fore-chamber of Prasat Panom Rung in the province of Buriram, north-eastern Thailand, probably constructed about the end of the 11th century. It represented the scene of the abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa and the killing of Mārīca by Rāma. Unfortunately this pediment has now been destroyed by vandalism and theft. The scene of Viṣṇu lying on the Nāga with Lakṣmī nursing at his feet was also popular and carved on many stone lintels during this epoch.

During this Lopburi period there are also some small bronzes that might represent scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* such as those decorating the base of an image but they are quite difficult to identify. Small bronze figures of Hanumān and Garuḍa used as a standard on top of a wooden pole have also been found.

* It should be Lakṣmaṇa - Ed.

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Bronze figures of Viṣṇu either standing alone or riding on Garuḍa are also quite frequent.

When we arrive at the Thai period beginning with the Chiengsaen or Northern Thai epoch (*circa* 11th or 12th-18th century), Theravāda Buddhism flourished and practically none of the *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes have been discovered. This Chiengsaen or Northern Thai period is divided into two sub-epochs : that of early Chiengsaen (11th or 12th-13th century) and later Chiengsaen or Chiengmai (14th-18th century).

For Sukhothai period (13th-14th century) which is regarded as the most beautiful epoch of Thai art, though the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* must have been already well known in Thailand as the name of the third great king of the Sukhothai dynasty derived from Rāma, King Rām Khambaeng (Rāma the Brave), and the word Rāma used as the name of some sites such as a cave, still very few scenes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* have been discovered in sculpture and painting. In the Sukhothai stone inscriptions the names of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa and probably Harihara are also referred to. King Li Thai, the grandson of King Rām Khambaeng, had two large bronze images of Śiva and Viṣṇu cast in 1350. During the Sukhothai period quite a number of bronze images of Hindu divinities were made. Most of them represent Harihara and the rest comprise of Śiva, Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Umā or Lakṣmī. It is believed that stucco decorations around the *uboseth* (ordination hall) of Wat Kaew, a large Buddhist monastery at Kampaengpet, a Sukhothai town in northern Thailand, might represent the scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* but unfortunately most of them have now fallen down. One of them that is still *in situ* might represent reclining Viṣṇu with Lakṣmī seated at his feet. These scenes probably belong to the Sukhothai or the early Ayudhya epoch.

As for the U-tong period, so far very few historical facts are known and still very much debatable. Sculptures found during this time are mostly Buddha images. They show the mixed styles which can be generalized into three groups : the first one donating the mixture between the Dvāravatī and Khmer or Lopburi arts (12th-13th century), the second one and that of the Khmer or Lopburi artistic expression having become more influential (13th-14th century) and the last one displaying the predominance of the Sukhothai style (14th-15th century).

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During the Ayudhya period (14th-18th century), the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* called *Rāmakīrti* (pronounced Rāmakien in Thai) and the other incarnations of Viṣṇu must have been again very popular as the official name of King U-tong, the founder of Ayudhya in 1350, is King Rāmāthibedi (Rāmādhipati) I and it is believed that the stucco decoration around the base of the main *prang* (tower) of Wat Mahathat which was probably constructed at Ayudhya in 1374 might represent the episode of the churning of the Milk Ocean in the Kūrmāvatāra. There were probably many Thai written versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* composed during this period but most of them have unfortunately disappeared because of the loss of Ayudhya in 1767. Now only two written poetic versions of the late Ayudhya period have survived. One was probably composed for the performance of the shadow-play figures and the other for dramatic dance.

At the end of the Ayudhya period (17th-18th century) some examples of the art concerning the *Rāmāyaṇa* can still be seen such as the painting on a book cabinet which was originally used to preserve Buddhist palm-leaf manuscripts in a monastery. This wooden cabinet which might belong to the late Ayudhya or early Bangkok period has its back part printed in gold on black lacquer representing two superb angel-guardians in typical Thai style.

The lateral panels are painted in colour and gold and on the left side is represented a tree that bears fruit in women (*nārīphala*) in the Himavanta jungle. The front panels are also richly painted in gold and colour describing the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* when the two sons of Rāma capture Hanumān in a jungle. It is interesting to note that in this scene though the figures and the story are typical Thai but the scenery such as trees, flowers and mountains denote clearly the Chinese influence. This last characteristic belongs to the late Ayudhya style.

For the end of this Ayudhya period or early Bangkok one might again talk about the painting in gold on black lacquer inside the wooden building called Ho Khien at Suan Pakkad Palace of H.R.H Princess Chumbhot of Nagara Svarga in Bangkok, where the life of the Buddha is represented on top and the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in a lower register. It is the largest space covered with painting in gold on black lacquer so far found.

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Also from this late period of Ayudhya exists a sculpture on a wooden pediment, formerly belonging to a Buddhist monastery in the town of Ayudhya, representing Viṣṇu riding on a crowned monkey, probably Hanumān. It is now preserved in the Ayudhya National Museum. This type of sculpture on the pediment of a Buddhist ordination hall especially the one showing Viṣṇu riding on Garuḍa has the symbolic meaning that that monastery is constructed by a king or is under the royal patronage. Mural paintings inside a brick building, which is believed to be the residence of a high monk, at Wat Putthaisawan, Ayudhya, might also depict some scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* but most of them have now been obliterated. Designs on some niello bowls which might belong to this late Ayudhya period, also represent the figure of Hanumān.

During the Thonburi (1767-1782) and Bangkok (1782) periods, many Thai versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were composed. The king of Thonburi himself wrote many short episodes of the story which were used for dramatic dance. King Rāma I of Bangkok (1782-1890) and his court poets composed the whole story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* for dramatic dance from the origin of Rāma's dynasty down to the end concerning the story of Rāma's two sons. This version is however very long and rather difficult to put on stage; so King Rāma II (1809-1824), his son who was also a great poet, composed a shorter version from the episode when Hanumān receives the order from Rāma to follow Sītā who has been abducted by Rāvaṇa until Śiva reconciles Rāma and Sītā. This version is very popular and regarded as the best Thai dramatic poetry. It has very often been acted on stage as a mask dance. These two Thai versions do not really follow Vālmīki's source and according to the research of Thai scholars, the Thai versions probably originate from the southern Indian one which might have come through Indonesia or the Śrīvijaya kingdom. There are many interpolations and adaptations, for instance Hanumān has become a great lover in the Thai version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. After these two versions King Mongkut or Rāma IV (1851-1868) wrote another dramatic poem on the episode of Rāma's wandering in the jungle and King Vajirayudh or Rāma VI (1910-1925) also composed a dramatic poem on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, this time based on Vālmīki's version. Apart from

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those royal literary works, there are also some other compositions concerning Rāma written by Thai poets, but they are not very important nor complete.

It is thus not surprising that there are many sculptures and paintings concerning the *Rāmāyaṇa* during the Bangkok period. During the first reign the most important evidence would be the mural paintings along the galleries around the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok depicting the *Rāmāyaṇa*-story from the birth of Sītā until the final war of her two sons with the help of Rāma's two younger brothers. Unfortunately these mural paintings have to be restored approximately every 25 years because of great humidity and the pouring rain. What we can see now date mostly from 1932 when they were repainted for the celebration of 150 years of Bangkok and now they are being repaired again for the coming second centenary of Bangkok in 1982. Aprat from these mural paintings one can also admire the workmanship of wooden screen painted in gold and black lacquer dating from the first reign and now preserved in the Bangkok National Museum. On one side is represented the scene of Indrajit when he transforms himself as Indra and is shooting an arrow that turn to be a group of *nāgas* and on the other side of Rāvaṇa's death.

During the reign of King Rāma II, Thai dramatic dance attained its zenith and some masks can still be admired. For the reign of King Rāma III (1824-1851) one might cite as an example mural paintings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the *vihāra* of Wat Nang Pya, Pisnulok, northern Thailand but the most interesting evidence on this great epic can be studied at Wat Po behind the Grand Palace in Bangkok. King Rāma III, a pious monarch, restored this Buddhist monastery and liked to make it a free university for the public. Therefore in the *Wat* compound many stone inscriptions on medicinal texts including message, poetry, formulae, etc., can be studied even to the present-day. Around the base of the new *ubosoth* (ordination hall) constructed by him there are 152 carved marble panels 43×38 cm. relating the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* from the abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa at the north-eastern corner around the clockwise direction to the pursuit of Rāma, the fighting between the demons and the monkeys until the catch of Sahasteja, Rāvaṇa's friend, by

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Hanumān. These sculptures were presumably executed after King Rāma I's Thai version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. They are very popular with foreigners and many paper rubbings of them have been sold to tourists. The date of these marble panels have been debatable. As two of them were found at Ayudhya, our former capital, some writers think that they date from that period. The author of this article, on the other hand, has the idea that they were carved during the third reign of Bangkok and as the governor of Ayudhya during that time was one of his favourites, the king might have given him these two surplus slabs because the governor was also restoring a Buddhist monastery in Ayudhya. These two slabs were however never used and have now been kept in Ayudhya National Museum.

The wooden panels of the four doors of this ordination hall at Wat Po in Bangkok are also beautifully inlaid with mother-of-pearl representing again the episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Two doors exist on the eastern side and the other two on the west. The northern panel of the eastern door on the north depicts the scene when Hanumān breaks the neck of the elephant-mount of Indrajit when he disguises himself as Indra and on the southern panel is represented the scene when Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma's younger brother, destroys the invulnerable ceremony of Indrajit. The northern panel of the southern door on the east represents the episode of the fighting between Hanumān and Sahasteja whereas the southern panel that of Hanumān and Virunchambang. The first panel of the southern door on the west shows the scene when Rāvaṇa sprinkles magical water on the corpses of his dead relatives and friends in order to revive them and the second of the death of Rāvaṇa himself. The western door on the north represents the story of the two sons of Rāma. The first panel when they capture Hanumān and the second when one of them is caught by Rāma's brothers. The other famous wooden sculpture concerning the *Rāmāyaṇa* in this renowned Buddhist monastery is carved on a pediment of a *vihāra* in the north-western corner of the *wat*, near the *vihāra* of a large reclining Buddha image, representing the scene when Hanumān is fighting against the two sons of Rāvaṇa who were born, according to the Thai version, from an elephant-mother.

The stone statues of Hanumān and Suvarnamaccha, a half female and half fish believed to be the daughter of Rāvaṇa and

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a fish-mother, can still be seen at the north-eastern angle of the *ubosoth* in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. They probably date from the third reign of Bangkok. During this time many scenes concerning the *Rāmāyaṇa* can also be perceived from the paintings in gold on black lacquer on many book-cabinets.

During the fourth reign, though the king himself wrote one episode of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in dramatic poetry, sculptures and paintings of this great epic declined. From this period onwards only minor arts concerning the *Rāmāyaṇa* can be admired such as dolls, shadow-play figures in colour or in black, puppets, dance masks, manuscripts and designs on utensils for instance niello bowls, cigarette cases, etc. The story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is still however well-known and popular with the Thai public until the present day.

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RĀMĀYAṆA IN THE ARTS OF ASIA

By **KAPILA VATSYAYAN**

A stage manifestation in the 20th century may represent a moment of time strictly contemporary unconnected with the past of a people or it may hold within its contemporary and often modern form a content and a theme which continuously recalls many moments of a historical cultural past, which has meaning and validity on the stage and the power to determine pattern of living, behaviour and thought.

The theatrical spectacle lasting two or three hours or a series of nights thus brings forth responses from audiences which lie deep in the psyche of a people. Asian drama has many such theatrical manifestations which cover a very vast geographical region and these can be traced back to many centuries in time. In spite of the complex and staggering mutiplicity of forms there have been certain themes which have travelled from one part of the Asian Continent to another with amazing mobility and fidelity. A cultural history of Asia could be reconstructed through a systematic tracing of a particular theme in many countries. This could be done with the lives of the Buddha or the stories of the Jātakas and with other myths, legends and fables which travelled thousands of miles without mechanical vehicles of transmission and without the printed word. The fascinating story of the movement of the *Pañcatantra* and the *Hitopadeśa* to countries in West Asia, Europe etc., is too well-known to be recounted. Equal only to the widespread prevalence of the story of the *Hitopadeśa* and the *Pañcatantra*, is the story of Rāma—a hero once, a god at other times a mere man yearning and conquering and a god in pain and anguish, a man destined to make choices between his Love and his sense of Duty. The story of Rāma seems to have bewitched and hypnotised generations of Asians belonging to countries with different religious, literary, and cultural traditions. Although the story of the Buddha, both as literature and as a religious and spiritual message, spread far and wide, and holds an unique place in this Civilization and Culture, the story of Rāma has equally held the imagination of all classes of people ranging from the most sophisticated and affluent to the most humble and

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lowly. It has permeated all aspects-living, religious, canonical and artistic.

Unlike the story of the Buddha, in some countries of the continent, it continues to be a vibrant tradition on the stage in many dance and drama-styles, shadow and puppet plays of all varieties; in operatic manifestations ranging from ballad singing to stylised recitation, it lives in the framework of the dances of magic and exorcism, and still determines the nature of musical orchestration in some countries. It also continues to be painted, whether in traditional forms, such as scrolls or mural paintings or through a fresh treatment by modern artists. Its popularity has not been confined to the traditional framework, but has impregnated a variety of modern media, such as comics, film strips, feature films, documentaries and the rest. The countries where the theme has survived in the traditions of the plastic and the performing arts could easily be identified as all the countries of the regions known as South Asia, South-East Asia and some countries of Central Asia.

In order to assess the place of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the contemporary theatres of Asia, particularly, South-East Asia, it would be necessary to keep this framework of time and space in view. The survival of the tradition has been possible on account of several cultural and historical factors, and these have to be kept in view while making any analytical or comparatie study of the *Rāmāyaṇa*-tradition in the performing arts of today.

While it is not the purpose of the present paper to recount the historical developments which took place in the growth of the theme or the manner of its transmission from one geographical area to the other, it would be necessary to clearly indicate the different streams of evolution of the theme both in the regions and in the different arts.

First and the foremost is the literary theme which is basic and fundamental to both the plastic and the performing arts. All the stage-manifestations have rested heavily on the literary works either of the region or of the particular period, or for that matter, on a borrowing from a foreign tradition. It is the literary creation, whether ballad or a plain narrative poem or an epic moving with architectonic grandeur or a drama divided or undivided into acts or scenes which has formed the basis of

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atistic interpretation for the sculptor, musician, dancer, or actor alike. In the plastic arts, more particularly in bas-relief and bronze sculpture the theme was popular and some characters were favourites. Later, one begins to find a delineation of the story in fresco and mural paintings; parallel to this development is the illustration of the story in thousands of miniatures found in India and elsewhere. Between the 15th and 18th centuries there is hardly a school of Indian miniature painting which does not include the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in its painting repertoire. The manner of portraiture and the treatment of the characters along with the distinctive forms of figures effected and was in turn influenced by stage forms very close and very distant from the plastic medium such as the puppet. While the monumental reliefs of Angkor Vat and the temples of Prambanan in Indonesia present a grand spectacle in stone, the bas-reliefs of Panataran of East Java are only a mirror-image of the highly developed Wyang tradition of the country. The bas-relief of Wat-Po temple of Thailand and the recently discovered stone reliefs, at the Pagoda of Maha Loka Mara Zein in Burma capture the respective puppet and the marionette forms of Thailand and Burma.To this could be added the innumerable instances of the prevalence of this theme in the Indian Sub-Continent along with some significant examples of stone relief sculpture found in Nepal and Śrī Laṅkā.

It will be clear from the above that in order to understand the stage spectacle of today, one has to traverse many centuries of historical time, and a wide area of space. An element which has to be added to the literary and sculptural traditions is the most effective and yet intangible 'Oral Tradition' which facilitated mobility and flexibility, and this may perhaps be identified as one single element which accounts for the amazing continuity, the freshness and endless potential for adaptability of the theme.

Our purpose is not to present a historical view of the development of the theme either in the literary, artistic or theatrical traditions of different countries, but merely to indicate the many points of similarity and distinctiveness in the different traditions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as prevalent today in South-East Asia, more particularly, India, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Nepal and Śrī Laṅkā. The traditions of the

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Rāmāyaṇa in these countries cannot be understood without reference to the traditions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Let us then begin with a brief account of the literary and sculptural traditions which have contributed to the making of the contemporary theatrical forms of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

For over a hundred years now, scholars have tried to determine the date of the first literary work based on the story of Rāma. European and Asian scholars have differed widely on the dates of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. German scholars have placed Vālmīki as early as the 12th century B.C.; others have placed him as late as the 4th century A.D. Recent research would indicate that it would be reasonable to place the author at about 3rd century B.C. In any case, for purposes of facility, for our present work it would be convenient to take this as a working date. However, the story of Rāma has to be traced back to earlier sources of the Sanskrit tradition. The names of the main characters of the Epic are mentioned in pre-*Rāmāyaṇa* literature in the *Ṛg Veda*. The character of Daśaratha appears and the word Rāma is also found in the same Veda. The third major character of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *viz.*, King Janaka is also found in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* and in some of the early and major *Upanishads*. Sītā is not mentioned in *Ṛg Veda* literature, but does appear in the *Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda* and in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*. She is identified as the daughter of Sūrya, the sun-god and is often endearigly called Sītā Sāvitrī. Besides these, there is no reference to the character of Hanumān in Vedic or Brāhmaṇical literature. Rāvaṇa, however, does appear once or twice, although not as a fully developed character.

The essential and basic elements of the characters of Rāma, Daśaratha, Janaka, Sītā, can perhaps be traced back to the cosmological symbolism attached to these names, in the Vedic, Brāhmaṇical and other liturgical texts of the Indian tradition. However, even if one can trace the origins of the symbolism attached to the main characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to earlier sources, Vālmīki's work remains unique both in conception and in form. Although the story of Rāma also occurs in the portions of *Mahābhārata* which is considered prior to *Rāmāyaṇa* by some, once Vālmīki had written the epic, the theme and its

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poetry gave rise to and impregnated practically all future traditions in the Indian sub-continent. For understanding its flowering it would be necessary to follow many parallel streams.

There was the development first in the literay traditions. Soon after the writing of the *Rāmāyaṇa* there were many versions in the Epic narrative tradition. The theme was treated by practically every Sanskrit dramatist and poet ranging from Bhāsa to Kālidāsa to Bhavabhūti and Rājaśekhara in Sanskrit. After the 9th century A.D., there appeared several versions in the different regional languages of India. Its history can be traced through Hindu, Buddhist and Jain texts as also the different languages of India. In many other countries of South-East Asia althouth the written versions of *Rāmāyaṇa* do not go back beyond the 9th century A.D., there is enough sculptural and inscriptional evidence to prove that the story was known to these countries at east by the early years of the Christian era. In this introduction, one may make only a passing reference to the versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in different countries. The theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was known to the Chinese through the *Daśaratha Jātaka* as early as 251 A.D., when King-Senhui rendered it into Chinese. In 472 A.D., another Chinese translation appeared of the *Nidāna* of *Daśaratha Jātaka*. The origins of the contemporary 'Monkey' of the Chinese opera can be traced back to these early beginnings and to the Hsi-yu-chi (a Chinese classic of the 16th century) which incorporated the episodes of Hanumān's search for Sītā.

In Śrī Laṅkā, Kumāradāsa composed the *Jānakīharaṇa* in the early 7th century A.D. In the 12th century A.D., this was followed by a prose paraphrase. Fables, myths, and folklore embody the story; the oral traditions in Śrī Laṅkā kept it alive for many centuries, even when no new literary versions were written. In the 19th century once again we find an interest in the *Rāmāyaṇa* when C. Don Bartianan brought out a translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The contemporary Singhalese novel was apparently influenced by this and by earlier adaptations of Sanskrit plays like the *Uttararāmacarita*.

From far off in Tibet, two versions in manuscripts were discovered; both belong to the 7th-9th century A.D. In the 15th century works like *Zhang-Zhung-pa Chowang drakpaipal*

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incorporate the story; versions of the tale are found in the Kalmuk language and other languages of the Mongolia and Siberia.

In Indonesia, the *Kakavin Rāmāyaṇa* was already well established by the 9th century, judging from the fact that the Prambanan reliefs roughly follow this version.

About the same time in the 9th century is also found an East Iranian version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Khotanese, an Iranian dialect.

Slightly prior to the *Kakawin Rāmāyaṇa* must have been the Khmer versions although written versions of *Rāmakier* do not appear till much later : inscriptions of the 7th century A.D. give us ample indications of its popularity in the Khmer Kingdom. From Laos we have the *Rāma-Jātaka* based on the *Panhasajātaka*. In the 13th century a Malaysian version entitled *Hikayat Seri Rāma* was possibly composed, although the written version can only be dated 17th century.

The Thai *Rāmakirti* or *Rāmakien* was written between 1782-1809, but the story of Rāma was known to the Thais much earlier and certainly by the 8th-9th centuries. The several written versions of the Burmese *Rāmāyaṇa* all belong to the period 1760 to 1910, although there is archaeological evidence to show that the story was known and popular in the Pagan period.

To this list could be added the innumerable versions of the languages/dialects of India. A bibliography alone would make a volume. Our purpose in broadly listing the literary sources at this stage is to draw attention to the fact that contemporary art expressions of a theme which has such a rich and varied history in the culture of a people presents both difficulties and challenges. It would be hard for an artist to copy and imitate earlier models and challenging to create new forms on an age-old theme which had been treated by poets, painters, musicians and dancers for centuries, exploring every nuance and shade of interpretation.

And yet this very fact paradoxically has caught the imagination of the creators of today, namely to present a theme, which would strike responsive chords in every heart and yet to present it in a manner which would be both new and meaningful. In fact, a careful

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analyais of the literary versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* along with versions in the performing arts reveals the strength and buoyancy of tradition which was continually assimilating and adapting itself to new conditions.

The sculptural and the painting traditions of South-East Asia reinforce and supplement the literary evidence. As expected, the first sculptural illustrations of the theme are found in India. During the Gupta period the temple of Deogarh was constructed. Although practically in ruins today, it is the first testimony in store of the interest of the sculptor. While it is likely that many more scenes were depicted in this Viṣṇu Temple, the survivals are not insignificant. In spite of the fact that in other portions of this temple Vishṇu is treated like a god or as an incarnation of Śeṣaśāyī or as Nara-Narāyāṇa, in the Rāma reliefs he is human, two-armed and a participator in the normal activities of the world. From amongst these scenes two are particularly noteworthy. One relates to the rejuvenation of Ahalyā and the other to Lakṣmaṇa's cutting the nose of Śūrpaṇakhā. While in the panel elating to Ahalyā, Rāma does have an aura of divinity, there is no such sense of divinity in the second panel where Lakṣmaṇa cuts the nose of Śūrpaṇakhā. It is important to note that the Ahalyā-episode is not popular in the Burmese, Thai, Laotian and Khmer versions. The story of Śūrpaṇakhā is known and is seen in a variety of artistic expressions. From India also comes the next major depiction of Rāma in stone. The sculptural monuments of the Rāṣṭrakūṭā period incorporate Buddhist, Jain and Hindu themes. The Kailāsa Temple in Ellora is not only an architectural wonder of a temple carved from the top to bottom from one rock, but is also a feat of sculptural skill. Here, Śiva dances in several niches; the Gandharvas emerge out of the walls of the Kailāsa in breath-taking dynamic movements reminiscent of the Kinnarī movements of the Thai and Burmese dancing, and above all there is the portraiture of the abduction of Sītā. In a magnificent sculpture relief we see the fight of Jaṭāyus with Rāvaṇa, as the latter carries away Sītā on his aerial cart. The perfect device of enlarging and foreshortening gives the effect of a front and back stage. Rāvaṇa is not seen as a dynamic figure but one centrainly taken to flight. The dimunitive Sītā in the background gives us another feature of later developments. The fight of Rāvaṇa and Jaṭāyus is again one which caught the imagination of the

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sculptor, poet, painter, puppet-master and dancer alike. There are many paintings, although not many sculptures, showing this particular episode in South East Asia, particularly Thailand and Cambodia. Another sculpture which is important from the point of view of stage developments is the one which depicts Rāvaṇa cutting off all his heads and giving them as offering to Maheśvara. This dramatic incident captured in rough rock tells us of Rāvaṇa who had attained his power and his valour, through a life of penance. The element of an earlier penance in the life of Rāvaṇa determines developments of this character muth later. It is only when the idea of penance and of his acquired power and subsequently misuse of that power disappears from the tradition, that Rāvaṇa is reduced to the size of an ordinary human villain. Closely related to the sculpture in which he is seen offering each of his heads to Maheśvara, is the other where Rāvaṇa is equally forcefully shaking from below Mountain Kailāsa on which sit calmly Śiva and Pārvatī. The myths which surrounded the characters of Rāma and Rāvaṇa are excellent indicators of both internal character development as also external form in different artistic expressions of the theme.

By the 9th century the depiction of the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme was not restricted to the Indian sub-continent. The magnificent portraiture in Angkor Vat, Benteay Srei depicts the *Rāmāyaṇa*-story. The pediments, lintels and the niches vibrate with the theme. About the same time there were temples in South India where the story was portrayed. From amongst these, the most important is the Nāgeśvarasvāmī temple at Kumbakonam of the 9th century. An episode of Rāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa crossing on a boat is seen here. While the pre-occupation of the Indian version about that time seems to be with the earlier history of Rāma whether it was the exploits in the forest or later the cutting of the nose of Śūrpaṇakhā, the Khmer kings seem to have been impressed most by the possibility of dramatic portrayal of the fight between Rāma and Rāvaṇa. The most famous sculptures, the temples at Angkor, *viz.*, the Prasat Au Temple and at Benteay Srei and the Baphoun Mountain, all built between the 11th to the 13th centuies A.D., shows marked emphasis on the fighting scenes between either the two armies or the two main characters of the epic. In the monumental scene of the Baphoun Mountain we see four panels beginning with Rāvaṇa with ten

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heads and twenty hands riding a chariot drawn by a horse; this is followed by another panel in which Hanumān grapples with the horse and ties his arms round the horse. In the third panel the story moves forward and Hanumān is shown on top of the horse grappling with Rāvaṇa; in the next Hanumān pushes him off the chariot and finally, Rāma is seen victorious, riding a chariot drawn by two horses. The story of the demon crow is also depicted on these walls.

The variance in emphasis or the difference in the selection of the particular portions gives us a clue to the gradual transformation which was taking place in different countries of Asia or for that matter within the same country. It would be interesting to compare the third major depiction of the theme in the region also belonging to the 10th century *i.e.*, in the site of Prambanan in Indonesia. Here, we have a full *Rāmāyaṇa*; a depiction which although reminiscent in style and form of Indian sculptue, is distinctively Indonesian in the manner in which the narrative moves forward and for the selection of the episodes depicted which are obviously from versions of the *Kawi Rāmāyaṇa*. The episode relating to the Demon Crow and the one relating to the building of the bridge has been commented upon frequently by scholars. The sculptural panels of Vāli and Sugrīva are also effective and would make a very good comparison with similar panels found in Angkor Vat. A unique panel found in Prambanan which does not occur in other sculptural reliefs is the one relating to the Demon Kabandha. Vālmīki speaks of this demon as one with a head of the stomach but no one ever portrayed this in drama or in painting before and after Pramabanan. In some folk versions this character appears. From the 12th century onwards, the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme appears in practically every temple of Viṣṇu. From Pattadakkal we have an elaborate series of the *Rāmayna*-theme fully supplemented with labels of names in Kannada. At the Hazara Rāma Temple in Hampi there are literally hundreds of scenes portrying various incidents from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. They run parallel to the incidents of the *Bhāgavata*, also depicted in the same temple.

At a time when the Vijayanagara Kings were building their temples in India, the Kingdom of East Java at Panataran was

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fully established. A comparison of the depiction of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the monuments of Vijayanagara and the depiction of the *Rāmāyaṇa* at the same time in Prambanan, Panataran in East Java clearly reveals the autochthonous character of the traditions of different countries. The East Javanese monument selects characters and incidents from versions which are close in content with the Tamil versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but very remote in form. A similar comparison could be made of the several sculptures on the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme found in the temples of the Naik period in India and the murals on the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme found between the 14th and the 17th centuries in Cambodia, Thailand and Burma. We have, for example, in the Musee Khmer at Phnom Penh ten groups of delightful paintings where the episodes include Janaka's discovery of Sītā, Rāma breaking the Bow, Paraśurāma's encounter with Rāma and the episode of the restoration of the dead monkeys with the help of Indra. We see here also the episodes of the meeting of Vibhīṣaṇa and Rāma, a theme not popular in the sculptural tradition but popular in the painting tradition and the fire ordeal of Sītā, again an episode, very popular in the painting and the performing arts tradition, but not seen much in the sculptural tradition. From the 16th century onwards there is a decline in the depiction of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in stone. However, two major achievements take place—one is the systematic and beautifully executed series in the Wat Po Temple of Bangkok belonging to the Bangkok School and the other still later of the 19th century in Burma. Both are low bas-relief and lean heavily on the Thai version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* where Hanumān is given an extremely important place; in fact, by this time the character of Hanumān seems to have undergone a great change from the days of his being an objective, faithful detached associate of Rāma to his being a hero in his own right and one who has an enchanting history of amorous sport from the very moment of his youth. To the same period belong the murals on the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Thailand. In the temple of the Emerald Buddha and in the Phrekeo Vat, Bangkok we have corridors after corridors of paintings relating to the Rāma-theme. Many elements of contemporary history, topology and the rest have entered into the making of these murals. Some episodes known to literary versions but unknown to sculptural tradition are depicted for the

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first time. One such episode relates to the attempt of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to destroy the soul of Rāvaṇa. It appears that the soul of Rāvaṇa was kept in an aviary and he was the recipient of a boon by which not one of his ten heads would destroy even if they were cut many times. Rāma learnt the secret that Rāvaṇa's soul is kept in an aviary with a teacher of Rāvaṇa known as Goputra. The painting depicts Hanumān and Aṅgada going to get the aviray. It faithfully incorporates the temporarily changed loyalty. Finally, it shows how through a stratagem Hanumān and Aṅgada brought the soul of Rāvaṇa. This story also becomes much more popular and prevalent in stage versions of the 19th and 20th centuries and does not find an important place in the traditions prior to the 19th century either in sculpture or painting.

As has been mentioned before, while there was no major attempt at the depiction of the *Rāmāyaṇa* through murals in India there was one significant development. This was the depiction of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the Lapākshi Temple in Andhra.

Can one say that the traditions of sculptures and of paintings continued to the 20th century in Asia, as they have continued in the field of the performing arts? Or would it be reasonable to assume that the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was taken up in the field of the performing arts just when it ceased to interest the sculptor and the painter and possibly the poet?

Be as it may, even these rough indications of the existence of the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme in stone sculptures, in murals and in miniature paintings will convince one of the incomparable pre-occupation of the artist with this story in the 20th century, although no great bronzes of Rāma and Sītā have been cast or stone reliefs engraved or miniature paintings made, the folk artist continues to be preoccupied with this theme. The village paintings, the scrolls and the many forms of traditional crafts incorporate this theme in terracotta figures, textile designs, embroidered table-cloth, wall-paintings, ivory handles and hangings and paper-machie effigies made for festive occasions. The professional modern artist is aso fascinated by the theme, although, except for two or three attempts by artists in the thirties, no outstanding pieces of art have emerged. The tradition lives more vibrantly in Bali and in Java where low stone relief is still an art to be known and mastered.

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The traditions of the plastic arts and the literary arts provide the material for a full and rounded flowering of the traditions of the performing arts. It remains an enigma to all historians, "why and how in the early part of the 18th century so many versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* came to be written in different parts of India, Thailand, Burma, etc." Surely, something, which was dead and gone for many years could not be revived through the single stroke of a royal proclamation whether it was in Thailand or in Burma or in Kerala or in Bengal or in Orissa.

It is here that, without hazarding a guess or being dogmatic, one may assert the unique role played by the oral tradition. All along when the theme was seemingly obliterated is was obviously prevalent in the oral traditions of each of these countries. A political or a social impetus gave whatever existed on official sanction, resulting in literary creations which could be written and disseminated. Origins of contemporary forms must be attributed to the written versions of the epic found in these countries between the 16th and the 19th centuries, more precisely the 18th century, but also to the sculptural oral traditions.

In contemporary Asia the theme is found in different artistic expressions on two or three levels:

(1) It exists in the form of a highly sanctified ritual where Rāma is considered an incarnation of god and is worshipped. This may be considered the plane of ritual or institutionalised religion.

(2) It is found in the life style of the agricultural calendar of many communities in this region extending from India to Indonesia, and from Nepal to Ceylon where a particular time of the year is associated with the birth of Rāma. The forms of the commemoration of the story of the birth and death of this hero vary. It may be in the form of the Navarātra as in Gujarat and in Nepal, or it may be in the form of the worship of Lakṣmī seen as the goddess form of Sītā or in the form of a plain narration of the episode of the hero's life or as tableau theatre known as the Dussehra festival popular in different regions of India, particularly Kulu, Vārāṇasī

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and Mysore. The pageant-like or the tableau-like narration is also known to other parts of Asia as in the Cart-play Tradition of the Nibhaktkhin Tradition of Burma which effected the Rāmakhin tradition. The mobile theatre or the theatre with a moving locale is largely fitted to the Rāma-theme in other countries.

(3) It is also known in plain ballad-singing or recitation at the most unsophisticated as also the highly sophisticated level. The Chāraṇas, as they are known, are ministrels who move from one part to another and collect audiences who hear in rapture the story of Rāma. The story is sometimes recited with a book in hand, but more often only with a stringed musical instrument. The ballad singer or the ministrel narrator is known to all parts of Asia including India, Ceylon, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Nepal. He may be considered perhaps the precursor of the present puppeteer or the dalang of the Asian tradition.

(4) The theme is seen in the form of drama proper as spoken word in the Wyang Wong Tradition of Indonesia and the many forms of the folk and traditional theatre of India, such as the Jātrā, the Tamāsha, the Bhavāi, the Yakshagāna and the Nauṭankī, theatre resting on the spoken word and the theatre presented as dance-drama where the recitative line form the basis of the interpretation, are both common.

(5) In dance-drama traditions, however, the Rāma-theme achieves its full glory in survival and interpretation of the tradition. The forms of the Khon play based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Thailand and in Cambodia and the Za-Pwe of burma along with the innumerable forms found in India, such as Kūḍiyaṭṭam, the Bhāgavata Mela, the Ankia Naṭ of Assam, the Mayurbhanj Chhau *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Purulia *Rāmāyaṇa* and finally the sophisticated Kathakali is theatre art at its finest and most chiselled. A pruposeful denial of the stage scenery, of realism and of an equally effective use of stylisation, abstraction,

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literary poetry, a complex musical orchestra and an articulation through stylised evocative pose and gestue is the essence of this sophisticated total theatre. Here, the elements of the literary, the plastic, stone and painting traditions along with the motive vibrations of the musical systems come together to make an integral whole.

(6) Perhaps the last step in abstraction and sophistication of these traditions is seen in several forms of shadow and puppet theatre known practically to all countries of the region. It has been argued by some scholars that the Wyang preceded the live theatre. It is not our purpose here to establish a chronology of the origin of the shadow and puppet theatre as opposed to the live theatre. In form, the range presented in the shadow and puppet theatre is almost as extensive as in live theatre. In the most sophisticated forms such as the Nang Sbek Thom of Cambodia and the Nang Yai of Thailand and Wyang Kulit and the Wyang Purwa of Indonesia, one can easily discern the heights of abstraction and articulation to which this art could be taken. In India also there are many varieties of the puppet tradition ranging from Marionette, Glove, Rod, Shadow, each coming from a different region of India.

(7) All this is the tradition and the survival and revival of the tradition; but the continuation of the tradition must depend upon new creations and creations which incorporate elements of the tradition and yet re-interpret them both in content and in form. Without stage patronage or social pressure, many choreographers and creators of drama, dance-drama, musical operas, have been attracted by this theme and have reinterpreted it through a modern idiom. In this context the variety found in India is impressive. Practically, all choreographers of dance and dance-drama in the 20th century have attempted to present a ballet based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme. Many play-wrights have also tried to

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reinterpret the *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme in India, Burma, Thailand, and Ceylon. Modern novels on the theme are considerable in number.

A detailed examination of these multiple traditions would obviously take volumes; the present author has attempted a brief monograph in which a few artistic traditions of South-East Asia have been examined.

Here one can only indicate a few conclusions which can be deduced after this detailed examination of theme, content, form and technique.

It is possible to answer the question whether the content and form of the Rāma-story present a vision of life which is similar. A close look at the story and its treatment will reveal that one element is common : simply stated, it may be identified as the basic approach of life, which negates Death as a Finality. Whether Rāma is human or Divine, King or God, he is by explicit statements in most versions and by implication in all others, an incarnation or capable of re-incarnation. In the versions where he is seen as re-incarnation of 'Viṣṇu', the creator principle, it is explicitly stated; in others by implications. Although forces of light and power, good and evil, natural and supernatural confront each other, there is a continuity of life, ever renewing and rejuvenating itself. No character works towards a destiny which ends in 'Death'. It is significant that even in the versions where Rāma is supposed to vanish into the River Sarayū (Burmese-Indian versions), he does not die. Also, appropriately in concrete terms, Rāma is conceived as ever young and ageless; the convention of making young boys or girls portray Rāma in stage versions has deep-rooted philosophic and cultural significance, and is not a matter of mere chance or expediency or fancy of stage directors in casting of roles. The life-death continuum was shared by Buddhists and Jain thought, and thus even when the Rāma-story was conceived as in the *Daśaratha Jātaka* or the stories of Jain Tīrthaṅkaras, this was a basic premise. This hypothesis or this vision is shared by all these cultures, and would it be too much to conclude that the power of the Rāma-theme continued and will continue until such time that this unspoken premise of life-death continuum is

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shared. This also accounts for the capacity of the most modern amongst Asians to feel at home in myth and legend which moves freely between celestial and terrestrial planes; they continue to have the capacity to see magic ritual and life together, to share in one breath the life of spirits and man of dream and reality, not as two opposite forces pitched against each other, but as interconnected facets continually interplaying in the microcosm and macrocosm. The interplay of the living and the dead is accepted as a fact deep down in the psyche in spite of the many layerings of subsequent rational thinking. No wonder these cultures have been termed as the cultures of encapsulation, where the kernel has remained, only further shells and sheaths have been added.

Related to this and almost more fundamental, is the concept of Time. Time did not have only a linear dimension of progression, where each successive stage of development is vertically higher and annihilates the earlier stage. Instead, the rhythm of the universe is conceived in terms of a cycle movement where repetitive moments occur as in a wheel. Often it is conceived as a still centre holding a large circumference : within it many moments of historical time can co-exist. A cyclic view of life and time poses no resistnace to the repetition of the old and the gradual permeation of the new. Movements in art do not grow by a constant self-conscious revolt against the immediately preceding movement : they move in a well-set rhythm and tempo of circles where themes, symbols, and motifs recur acquiring new significance. the pattern which emerges within the specific region and amongst different regions, is not of annihilation of earlier levels or replacement of indigenous by national or local character by an alien influence; it is instead a pattern of partially overlapping circles aranged in an order of interconnection which makes for both sharing and overlapping of distinct untouched autonomous areas, within the periphery of any given circle. The centres of all circles are distinct, separate entities. The theory of waves of influence states only a partial truth of this phenomena in South-East Asia and not the whole truth. The Rāma-theme, its journey in time and its impregnation in space provides an excellent illustration of the Life-Death continuum and cyclic time vision.

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Rāma occurs again and again, acquiring new meaning and validity. So does Sītā, not only as a beautiful woman born to suffer and chasten but also as the primeval forces of terrestrial energy and its purification. Rāvaṇa and the forces he represents also occur again and again, acquiring new meaning and validity by a ready flexibility of the mind to understnd present events through the reality of the myth. Tradition and Modernity, traditon and contemporaneity are thus not clashing with each other, they are mingling and merging and supporting each other.

The two main principles enunciated above give rise to theories and principles which govern artistic creation. In such a vision, the framework of dramatic unities of time and place is irrelevent : character-development as linear progression, arising out of inner conflict is also irrelevant The artistic form of the *Rāmāyaṇa* whether as epic narrative or as Sanskrit drama or as the several versions of South-East Asia exhibit this disregard for the unities of time and place and of character-development. Rāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, Rāvaṇa, Hanumān and a host of other characters go through a variety of ordeals, sufferings, privations, defeats and victories, but none questions himself or his individual path of action. Thus life is abstracted into recurring states and moments; characters become symbolic of deep philosophic, spiritual meaning and not just particular human beings in states of mental conflict and action arising out of it, at a single moment of time.

The capacity of abstraction finds a concrete manifestation in variety of artistic forms and techniques, common to the region under consideration; whether it is, the Ayang Wong or Orang, or the Khol or Khon or the Rāmalīlā of Vārāṇasī of Kathakali, abstraction and stylisation are the essence. Plurality arises out of the methods of abstraction adopted and not from adherence to different principles of artistic creation.

Individual characters represent qualities, moods, shades of meaning, colour and line; all symbolic at their best, stereotyped conventional characters and their worst. Forms and techniques acquire a chiselled sophistication and refinement at their highest; dull repetitive forms at their lowest; in all case, the artist never aims at 'Particularity' or uniqueness.

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Also, a perusal of the history of the development of the theme of *Rāmāyaṇa* reveals that in each of these regions, no water-tight compatments exist between levels of artistic creation. The categorisation of the levels into folk and classical becomes almost an impossibility; the degree of stylisation indicates the level of refinement or sophistication, but there is no such thing as the drama of realism as opposed to drama of idealism or stylisation. A mobility between sophisticated and unsophisticated (or what should be termed as elitist and popular) is discernibe in regions. There is both an upward and a downward movement, not only a filtering through of an elitist culture to popular levels. An interdependence is apparent in all regions.

Equally important is the interdependence and interrelationship of the literary, performing and the plastic arts. While each art maintains its autonomous character, principles which govern the artistic forms give each region a distinctiveness.

Finally, there is ample evidence to prove that there was mobility between regions at certain levels. All this lead to creations which represent at once many movements of history and facets of culture which although mutually contradictory individuals, fall into a consistent whole when held together in an art form.

The *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme illustrates these movements and principles of creations remarkably; both the diffusionist tendencies as also the autochthonous character of regional cultures and art-styles becomes apparent.

Having made these broad generalisations, let us see them in the context of *Rāmāyaṇa*. We observe that the character of Rāma undergoes slight modifications and changes in these cultures. The differences in Portraiture within a common frame of reference are not insignificant. In India, although he began as a hero, he was deified. This aspect of his character is stressed in practically all Indian versions while shades of meaning and colour vary. In 'Burma' there continues to be the echoes of the 'Bodhisattva' or the hero symbolising moral and ethical good. The preliminaries before the play are suggestive of the extrra artistic importance given to him. In Thailand, Cambodia and Java, he is a hero no doubt, but not a god with a pre-determined path of action. Often he is portrayed as a romantic hero,

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specially in versions where he throws out Sītā in a fit of jealousy aftter she has painted a portrait of Rāvaṇa on the fan. But in all versions he is the embodiment of good.

Sītā's character also goes through many transformations and changes. The one consistent and invariable element is her association to the earth. In all versions, she comes from the earth, is discovered there and goes back to it. The symbolism attached to the myth initially gets lost, or is supeimposed by others, but the undertones continue. In Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* she is a strong, proud woman who is an equal match for Rāma. The conversation between Rāma and Sītā just before the fire ordeal is powerful and profoundly significant. Tulasīdāsa's Sītā is the long suffering medieval unquestioning woman; in both cases, however, she is faithful to the last and dignified in every inch of her conduct. In the Cambodian version, with Sītā's allowing Rāvaṇa's entering into the hut, some of the drama is lost and, so is the irony. She remains, however, the faithful wife who confronts a villain and therefore feels free to rebuke and slap him. This conception is very different from other versions; in Indonesian, particularly Balinese versions, she is deified as Devī Sintā.

The most consistent character is that of Hanumān who epitomises calm, solid loyalty. In all versions, he is connected with the 'Wind-God', the son of 'Vāyu' and is the last word in friendship and faithfulness. We find many differences in the conception which ranges from his being a bachelor and a celibate in all Indian versions to his being an amorous hero, father of sons through *apsarās* and nymphs in the Thai versions. On the stage he is heavy in Indian version, light and spritely in South-East Asian versions.

The character of Rāvaṇa also changes with regions. He is portrayed as a powerful ascetic in his previous birth in all versions, but his character changes from a cultivated dignified king to a despot drunk with power, to a simple evil villain in others.

We could dwell at some length on the differences in forms and artistic skills and techniques. However, it may be worthwhile to remember that the reciter-declamator is important in all artistic manifestations; next is the ballad singer with

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parallel development which takes place in bas-relief and mural paintings giving rise to the pageant picture, tableaux drama. The earliest versions in Thailand, Burma, India confirm this view. Whether the shadow and puppet theatre preceded or followed the stage version of Rāma remains a question mark. In all forms there was a close relationship between the declaimed verse, sung poetry, the music, the plastic manifestation and the stage presentation. Forms of shadow and puppet theatre and stage plays or dance-dramas were only two different dimensions of the same genre, rather than two different art forms. The close inter-relationship between the artistic expressions of a particular region is evident in all the *Rāmāyaṇa* presentations. Paralleled runs the connection of a specific form or genre amongst regions. Thus methods of manipulation is shadow theatre, specially of the rods is common to most regions. Cambodia and Thailand are particularly similar; the Andhra Bommalāṭṭam and the Kerala puppets are close seconds. The mask theatre of the Khol and Khon of the Burmese Zat and the Indian Purulia dancers is comparable. While Thai, Burmese, Laotian, Cambodian, Indonesian masks have much in common; Indian masks, particularly of Purulia are quite different. Dance techniques and musical modes also have strong affinities in spite of their distinctiveness. The priciple of the stylised pose of the gesture is followed by all traditions; in some cases the pose is more significant as in the Thai and Khmer traditions, in others facial miming and gesticulation with the words as in Kathakali and Bharatanāṭyam. A basic colour symbolism is also common; green is always associated with Rāma, white with Hanumān, red and black with Rāvaṇa.

Patterns of costuming decor and the methods and techniques of making and designing masks is distinctive to each region, except Thailand and Cambodia which are similar. So also are the musical compositions, both in the orchestration pattern and the mods and tunes used. The only feature is the repetitive melodic line and a rhythm, both cyclic and circular in structuring.

And above all is the phenomenon of the amazing tenacity of the oral traditions which has facilitated the survival and continuance of the traditions in contemporary Asia. Even when the theme seemed to run into a dry sand-bed, it never died, for

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the oral tradition was sustaining it. Also the oral traditions supported, supplemented and complimented the traditions of the written word and of brick, mortar, clay stone, colour and paint. It was also responsible for facilitating processes of assimilation without 'electric shock' experienes and providing the basis of integrated amalgamation. The world-view, the affirmation of life-death continuum, the adherence to a concept of cyclic time, through a method of transmission which was a total integrated approach, have led to art creations on the *Rāmāyaṇa* in all centuries including the 20th, which have many dimensions in time. A single spectacle has element in it which can be traced back not to one moment of historical time, but to several; it has other elements which echo cultures of distant lands; and yet the creation is new and contemporary with a distinct identity and personality. It is not an artificial resurrection of a dead language, a piece of antiquity but a living being of the present.

And yet more vistas and avenues of exploration await the interest of creative minds and artists. Kamban, the Tamil poet, begins his *Rāmāyaṇa* with the words :

"A a cat standing on the shores of the ocean of milk thinks it can lick up the whole ocean, I hope to retell the *Rāmāyaṇa* story already told by Vālmīki." But from Kamban to Gandhi in India and from the Rulers of Champa to Maha Eisey in Khmer and from the rulers of Śrīvijaya to Dhani Nivat, creative minds in Asia have been drawn to this epic of all epics.

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List of participants who attended the International Rāmāyaṇa Seminar, 8-12 December 1975, organised by the Sahitya Akademi in cooperation with the Government of India, Ministry of Education

FOREIGN DELEGATES

BURMA :

1. Mr. U. Thein Han,
   Chairman of the Burma Historical Commission,
   Cultural House,
   Nawarat Road,
   Rangoon (Burma).

2. Mr. U. Khin Zaw,
   Special Adviser (Music),
   Ministry of Culture,
   Government of Burma,
   Rangoon.

HOLLAND :

3. Prof. C. Hooykaas,
   Muurbloemweg 6,
   Den Haag,
   Holland.

INDONESIA :

4. Dr. Soewito Santoso,
   A.N.U., P.O. Box 4,
   Canberra 2600 (Australia).

JAPAN :

5. Prof. Minoru Hara,
   Professor of Sanskrit,
   University of Tokyo,
   Tokyo (Japan).

MALAYSIA :

6. Dr. Amin Sweeney,
   IBKKM,
   National University of Malaysia,
   Jalan Pantai Baru,
   Kuala Lumpur, (Malaysia).

7. Prof. Ismail Hussein,
   Department of Malay Studies,
   University of Malaya,
   Kuala Lumpur 22-11
   (Malaysia).

8. Prof. S. Singaravelu,
   University of Malaysia,
   Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia).

MONGOLIA:

9. Prof. Damdin-suren,
   Academy of Sciences of the MPR,
   Ulanbator (Mongolia).

PHILIPPINES :

10. Dr. Juan R. Francisco,
    13 J. Luna Street, Area 2,
    U.P. Campus, Dilman,
    Quezon City 3004,
    Philippines.

SRI LANKA :

11. Mr. J. Tilakasiri,
    Professor of Sanskrit,
    University of Ceylon,
    Paradaniya, Ceylon.

12. Dr. C. E. Godakumbura,
    4, Melder Place,
    Nugegoda.

THAILAND :

13. Mr. Chamlong Sarapadnuke,
    Lecturer,
    Silpakorn University,
    Bangkok (Thailand).

14. Prof. M.C. Subhadradis Diskul,
    Faculty of Archaeology,
    Silpakorn University,
    Bangkok (Thailand)

U.S.A. :

15. Dr. Harry M. Buck,
    Wilson College,
    Chambersburg,
    Pennsylvania-17201.

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    Paradaniya, Ceylon.

12. Dr. C. E. Godakumbura,
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    Nugegoda.

THAILAND :

13. Mr. Chamlong Sarapadnuke,
    Lecturer,
    Silpakorn University,
    Bangkok (Thailand).

14. Prof. M.C. Subhadradis Diskul,
    Faculty of Archaeology,
    Silpakorn University,
    Bangkok (Thailand)

U.S.A. :

15. Dr. Harry M. Buck,
    Wilson College,
    Chambersburg,
    Pennsylvania-17201.

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INDIAN DELEGATES

Prof. Suniti Kumar Chatterji
President, Sahitya Akademi

Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar
Vice-President, Sahitya Akademi

Dr. R. S. Kelkar
Secretary, Sahitya Akademi

1. Dr. (Smt.) Induja Awasthi,
DII/227, Vinay Marg,
New Delhi-110 021.

2. Dr. Suresh Awasthi,
DII/227, Vinay Marg,
New Delhi-110 021.

3. Dr. Asutosh Bhattacharya,
President,
Research Institute of Folk Culture,
32, Becharam Chatterji Road,
Calcutta.

4. Dr. (Smt.) Sukumari Bhattacharji,
Reader in Sanskrit,
Jadavpur University,
Calcutta.

5. Fr. Camille Bulcke,
Manresa House,
Post Box No. 2,
Ranchi.

6. Prof. Bhabatosh Datta,
Principal,
Acharya B.N. Seal College,
P.O. Cooch Behar,
West Bengal.

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"SETU"
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Ahmedabad-6.

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"SETU"
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